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M A Y.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

“CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,”

“THE MINISTER’S WIFE,” “OMBRA,”

&c., &c.

“*Maggio*

Non ha paragio.”

ITALIAN PROVERB.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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M A Y.

CHAPTER I.

THE situation of the little party of strangers in the west wing of Pitcomlie for the week after their arrival was strange enough. They were in the house, but not of it. Partly on pretence of their fatigue, partly because of the agitated condition of the family, they were not asked to go down stairs, and it was the second day before Marjory even paid them a visit. On the afternoon of their arrival Mr. Charles went solemnly upstairs, and kissed the babies, and shook hands with his new niece. Mrs. Charles had been carefully tutored by her sister, and she had so many

“And her elder brother—so very short a time before.”

“Her elder brother?”

“I forgot. You left India before the news could have reached you. Three of them have been swept off one after another. Mr. Heriot died of grief; he never got over poor Tom’s death. The shock to Miss Heriot was not so much her father’s death, as her certainty that yesterday’s news would kill him. All this has affected her deeply. We had almost to force her to do nothing, to see nobody except ourselves—to allow herself to rest.”

“You have a very deep interest in Miss Heriot?” Verna asked, hesitatingly. She did not even know his name. “Or perhaps—I beg your pardon, I am only a stranger—perhaps you are one of the family?”

Fanshawe had started slightly; he had looked up at her with a sudden movement when she made that suggestion. It had brought the colour to his face.

“I—take a deep interest in all the family,” he said. “No, I am not one of them. My name is

Fanshawe. I was with poor Tom Heriot when he died. I am glad to be of use at this moment as far as I can."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not mean to put embarrassing questions," she said. "Please forgive me; I am quite a stranger. Poor Matty does not know much, never having been at home since she was married; and I know nothing at all. We did not know Mr. Tom Heriot was dead. What a terrible thing! father and two sons—all the sons—there are no more?"

"No more—the whole family—except Miss Heriot and her little sister, and your sister's boys—have been swept away."

Verna's heart was beating wildly. She could scarcely contain the sudden flood of triumph that had poured into all her veins. At last she was going to be a great lady. Everything would be in her hands. Marry! why, what was marrying to this? But she restrained herself, to make assurance sure.

"Poor little Tommy," she said, with a demure and measured tone, which was put on to hide her emotion, "only three years old; is it possible that

he is the master of all this—that everything depends on him?”

“Poor child!” said Fanshawe.

What a farce these words seemed! Oh happy child, blessed child, most fortunate baby, with eighteen years of a minority before him, and his aunt, Inverna Basset, the only clever one of the family to do everything for him! But she dared not betray the exultation that coursed through all her veins.

“I hope Miss Heriot will come to see us to-morrow,” she said. “It will be better for—all of us—if she will be friendly and come.”

Somehow there was a change of inflection in this which caught Fanshawe’s ear. He was quite incapable of defining what it meant. The rapid revolution of sentiment, the change from humility and doubt into superiority and certainty, the implied warning, too delicate to be a threat, that it would be better “for all of us” that the daughter of the house should visit its new mistress, all these gradations of thought went beyond his capacity. He did not understand; but still his ear, though not

his intelligence, caught some change in the tone.

“I do not think,” he said, with some coldness, though he could not have told why, “that we shall be able to persuade Miss Heriot to rest beyond to-day.”

“I am glad of that,” said Verna. “I mean I shall be very glad to see her. I saw her, it is true, yesterday, here, but she did not notice me. Of course it was a terrible moment for her—and for all of us,” she added, with a little meaning. “Matty’s first coming home—”

Was there a little emphasis on that last word? Certainly there was a change of tone.

Fanshawe was confused; he could not quite tell why. As for Verna, her little brain was in a whirl. She wanted to be alone to think. She put up her eye-glass once more, and inspected the house with such a wild sense of power that her faculties for the moment seemed taken from her.

“Good evening,” she said, hastily. “I think I will go back to my poor sister, who has no one but me to take thought for her.”

How everything had changed! She had no need now to be civil to anybody; no need to put on any mask, or restrain her real feelings. She rushed into the house, and upstairs, full of her discovery; but before she reached her sister's room, her steps grew slower, and her thoughts less eager. Verna was ignorant, very ignorant. How did she know that there might not be some law, or some will, or something that would modify this too delightful, too glorious state of affairs?

A little chill crept over her. Little Tommy's heirship might not be absolutely certain, after all. If it was certain, would not everything have been turned over to Matilda at once? Would Miss Heriot still venture to give herself airs as if she were the mistress of the house? Would she not rather come humbly to them, and do her best to conciliate and find favour in the eyes of the new mistress? Verna would have done so; and it was hard for her to realise the emotions of so very different a woman, whom, besides, she did not know. The result of all her musings, however, was that she would

for the present say nothing to Matilda. She would leave her for the moment in her uncertainty, wondering what the family meant to do with her. Matilda might be kept in the desirable state of subjection so long as she was thus humble in her expectations; but Verna knew that when she was mistress of Pitcomlie she would no longer consent to cry and to abstain from talking.

Accordingly, she concluded to keep her news to herself. When she entered the room where her sister still lay on the sofa, chatting with her maids, and shrieking now and then an ineffectual remonstrance against Tommy's noisy proceedings, there came into Verna's mind a sudden and sharp conviction of the foolish mistakes which Providence is always making in the management of the world.

She had made up her mind that it was she who was to reign in Pitcomlie if Tommy turned out to be really the heir; but how would she have to do it? By means of coaxing, frightening, humouring, and keeping in good disposition this foolish sister, whom she had been half

ashamed of for her silliness all her life. Matilda would be the real possessor of all these advantages. She herself would only enjoy them as Matilda's deputy. Oh! if the Powers above had but been judicious enough to bestow them direct upon the person justly qualified! This sudden thought made her sharp and angry as she went into the luxurious room, which Matilda had turned into chaos.

"What a mess everything is in!" she cried. "Elvin, for Heaven's sake get those things cleared away, and try to be something like tidy. They will think us a pack of savages. Matty, why don't you exert yourself a little? I declare it is an absolute disgrace to let everything go like this. We are not in India, where one can't move for the heat. And what if Miss Heriot were to come up now and find you like this, all in a muddle, baby crying, and Tommy rioting, and your cap off?"

"I have as good a right to do what I like as Miss Heriot has," said Matilda, pouting; "and I hate your odious cap."

"You have got to wear it," said the peremptory

Verna, picking up the unfortunate head-dress from the floor; "and if I were you I would rather wear it clean than dirty. As it is so late, Elvin may put it away carefully in a drawer; but, Matty, Miss Heriot—"

"Oh! how I do hate Miss Heriot!" said Matilda, ready to cry.

"You don't know what she may have in her power," said Verna, with a curious enjoyment of the picture she was about to draw. "She may be able to do everything for you, or perhaps nothing; how can we tell? But in the meantime it is better to have her good opinion. Do as I told you; talk as little as you can, and look as pitiful as you please. Probably we shall have to go to the funeral; or if not to the funeral—we can say you are not well enough—at least to the reading of the will, and that will be very important. Nobody can expect you to do anything but cry. Whatever you may hear, Matty, for God's sake don't commit yourself to say anything. Leave it all to me. It will save you ever so much trouble, and you may be sure it will succeed better. You know you are not so quick as I

am ; you are a great deal prettier, but not so quick. Now do promise, there's a darling. Take your best handkerchief, and tie your cap well round your face, and cry all the time ; not noisily, but in a nice ladylike way. It will have the very best effect ; and if you promise, it will leave my mind quite easy, and I can give my attention to what is going on. Now, Matty dear, won't you do as much as this for Tommy's sake and for me?"

"Is the funeral to be to-morrow?" said Matilda, putting off the formality of the promise.

"Why, I tell you again this is not India, you silly child," said Verna. "It will not be, I suppose, till this day week, and there will be hosts of people. I shall have quantities to do without looking after you. Now promise, Matty ! If you don't, I can't answer for what may happen ; they may send you back to papa—"

"I will do whatever is best," said Matilda, moved by this horrible threat. "Tell me what is best, and I will do it. Oh, they never could

think of that! They must give me so much a year at least, and some place to live in. I could not go back to papa to be snubbed and treated like a baby, and hear the dear children sworn at, and never dare venture to speak to anyone. I would rather die."

"If you are good, and do what I tell you, it will never happen," said Verna, kissing her. "I have a great deal in my head, Matty. I have heard something—but never you mind. I will tell you when I have found it all out. I should not wonder if we were to be very well off, and never to require to do anything after this but please ourselves. Hush! don't agitate yourself. You can't think what a deal I have to think of; but we shall know all about it when the funeral is over, and how it is all to be."

This had to content Matilda for the moment, and she went to bed with her head buzzing with all kinds of pleasant thoughts. Poor Charlie! it would have been much "nicer" if he had lived; he gave her a great deal more of her own way than Verna did; he was more of a comfort to her—and then a woman is always of more conse-

quence when there is a man behind her to be appealed to. But still, now that poor Charlie was dead and gone, and no thinking nor crying could bring him back, perhaps it might be for the best. If the old gentleman had left him something very nice in his will, as Verna seemed to expect, Matilda thought she would go to some bright nice place where there would be good society, and bring up Tommy. Perhaps she might be able to have a carriage, if it was as much as Verna thought—and never would require to think twice about a new dress, or a pretty bracelet, or anything she might fancy. These gentle fancies lulled her as she went to sleep. Yes, it was a pious thought, such a thought as ought to be cultivated in the bosom of every woman; perhaps after all it might turn out that everything had been for the best.

Verna was not so pious. She sat at her open window half the night, though the air was chill, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. She could not quite persuade herself that it was possible. “If—” she said to herself, before she set

off on a wild canter of imagination through all the glories that could be thought of. If—

What a thing it would be! To be virtual mistress of this house, to have everything in her power, to be able to turn out “the family” if she pleased, and make her own will superior everywhere! This hope intoxicated the young woman. The instinct of managing everybody and everything had been strong in her all her life; but it never had had full scope. She had managed her father’s house, but that was little; and he himself was a rough man, who despised women, and was not capable of being managed. Now what unbounded opportunities would be hers—the estate, the house, the village, nay, the county! Verna’s ambition leaped at all. And she never intended to rule badly, unkindly, or do anything but good; Matilda should be as happy as the day was long, she said to herself; Tommy should be sent to the best of schools. She would be as polite as possible to the Heriots, and beg them to consider Pitcomlie as their home as long as it suited them.

She meant very well. She would get up coal clubs, and clothing clubs, and all sorts of benevolence in the village. She would be a second providence for the poor people. Never were there better intentions than those which Verna formed as she sat at the window, her eyes shining with anticipation, if—

That was the great thing. The foundations, perhaps, might fail under her feet; it might all come to nothing; but if—

What a good ruler, how considerate of all the needs of her empire she meant to be! People so often prospectively good in this world; whether their goodness would come to nothing if they had the power, it is impossible to tell; but hoping for it, looking forward to it, how good they mean to be!

That these feelings should exist above stairs, while such very different emotions were in the minds of the family below, where two deaths had occurred, as it were, on one day, need not surprise any one. Verna had been very sorry for the sufferers; but it was not in the nature of

things that she could be more than sorry. Her own affairs were nearest to her. They and she inhabited different spheres.

CHAPTER II.

“WHAT did you think of them?” said Fanshawe.

“She cried a great deal; she is very young and pretty. Poor child!” said Marjory. “We did not say much to each other; how could we? Indeed, you know that I cannot talk.”

“I know—” said Fanshawe hastily, and then stopped short. He had done everything for them all during those sad days. It was the eve of the funeral now, and it was he who had taken every necessary care upon him; but I cannot explain how he had grown into the house. They were strangers to him a very short time before; even, it was not long since he had yawned and asked himself why he did not go away? But now it seemed to

him that he had lived there all his life; that he had never had any warmer interests; that he could as soon separate himself from his life as from all that remained of the diminished family. He had brought Marjory out as her brother might have done on the eve of that melancholy ceremonial, to breathe the fresh evening breeze, and accustom herself a little to the outer world once more. He had led her, not to the cliff, but to the garden, where the associations were less overwhelming.

The flower-garden was at the other side of the house, sheltered from all the sea-winds by the old Manor-house on the East, and warmly nestling into the angles of the present mansion. It was an old-fashioned garden; there were no stiff flower-beds in it, no studies of colour in red and blue and yellow; no ribbons of brown leafage, or artificial lines. In summer, old roses, old lilies—the flowers that our grandfathers loved, stood about the borders, making the whole garden sweet; but at present, in the Spring, there was little except crisp lines of crocuses and snow-drops; at one side was an avenue of limes, which had,

people supposed, been the avenue of the old house. These limes were not large trees, they were too near the sea for that; but they had begun to shake out their light silken green leaves in the soft April air.

It was here the two were walking on the eve of Mr. Heriot's funeral. The gate of the old house was still standing, ornamented with the cognizance of the Heriots, at the end of the avenue, and here there was still an exit upon the cliff; close to it was the door of the kitchen-garden. I explain this to show how the circumstances, which were about to happen, came to pass. Marjory had walked up and down the avenue three or four times—leaning on Fanshawe's arm. It had become natural to accept his arm, to take both physical and moral support from him. I do not know that either of them had ever gone further in their imaginations; Marjory, at least, had not. She had no time for any thoughts about herself. Ever since she had known Fanshawe, she had been absorbed in matters of a very different kind. She took his support, his kindness, his

sympathy, almost, I fear, as a matter of course, forgetting that she had no right to it; not entering into the question at all; accepting the help which was at hand without questioning what it was.

And Fanshawe, for his part, thought badly of himself when other thoughts would gleam across his mind by turns. He shook himself, as it were, and was angry, asking himself, "Is this the time?—am I the sort of fellow?" He was as far from contemplating marriage as a possibility as any good-for-nothing could be. Marriage! out of Marjory's presence how he would have laughed at the idea! But still there had been gleams of light which had passed across him, fitful glimpses of meaning, even of a kind of purpose, repressed instantly by a conviction of their utter vanity and foolishness. Sometimes, unawares, when he was thinking of other things, some sudden plan would come into his head, some vision would flit before his eyes; but they were always involuntary. He had not even recognised them so far as to struggle against them. They were stray visitants that

came upon him without a moment's notice un-
awares, and that were driven away as intruders,
without a moment's indulgence. But sometimes
along with these visions, strange words would
throw themselves in his way, and claim so
urgently to be spoken, that it was very hard
to resist them.

This was one of those occasions. In answer
to her languid words, "You know I cannot
talk," some devil or other (he thought) thrust
a passionate, too expressive answer into his
mind. And he had, so to speak, to stoop and
pick it up, and throw it from him like a
firebrand, before he could continue the calm
conversation in which they had been en-
gaged.

"You are getting tired, I think," he said,
anxiously. "Come and sit down here."

"I am not tired," said Marjory. "It is wrong
to think that because the mind is worn out
the body must be tired too. Does it not some-
times seem all the stronger? I think it would
be best to be ill; but as I am not ill, what
can I do? I can't pretend. I am not tired,

except of doing nothing, of being cooped up, of being good for nothing—”

“That is what I am,” he said, with a slight glance down upon her, and then turning his head away. “I am not of any use either to myself or to other people.”

“How can you say so, Mr. Fanshawe? To us you have been everything that the kindest friend could be.”

“For why? Because I liked it; because I have been so mixed up—pardon the homely word—with you and yours; not for any good reason; which I suppose, as I have been told often, is the only rule of value. Indeed, the great thing is that you have allowed me to stay, and made me, to my own surprise, good for something; not much even now. If I tried ever so often, in an ordinary way I should not know what to do.”

Marjory made no answer. He had seated her on a bench under the lime-trees. He had been standing opposite, but now he sat down by her. He had discovered before that she was not to be tempted into these personal discussions. She was

twisting and untwisting her fingers vaguely, with a nervous habit, not thinking what she did.

“Life is so easy for some people,” she said, at last, “quite clearly marked out, with nothing strange or complicated in it. It has always been so with us. I don’t think it will be so in the future. I begin to feel as if the well-known, well-worn path had stopped, and I do not know what odd track may follow. I never understood the feeling before. Perhaps you, who have had more experience—you may understand it, I don’t.”

“That is what I mean,” he said, “only I never had any well-worn path to lose. Mine is like this little byway close to us. A big old stone gate, with shields and all the rest, and nothing opening from it, except that irregular line on the turf. One keeps to it because there is nothing else to keep to. This will never be your case, but it is mine. I am good for nothing. Nobody comes in by me, or goes out by me—”

“Not like the path then,” said Marjory, with a faint smile, “for there is some one

knocking. Is it at the old gate or the garden door?"

It was twilight, and their bench, though completely hidden, was close to both entrances. In the little pause which followed, the knocking went on softly, and after a while the gardener was heard trudging along the gravel path with his heavy steps.

"Wha's there?" he said.

"It's me, Sir," answered another voice; and then after a pause—"a stranger, if ye please, that wanted to ask a question. I'll no keep you long. It's a Mr. Heriot, is't no, that lives here?"

"Ay, my woman," said the voice of the old gardener. "You may say that. There's been a Mr. Heriot here for as long as kirks have been standing or kailyards planted. But there's nae Mr. Heriot the now, for he died on Tuesday, and he's to be buried the morn."

"Eh, poor man!" said the other, in a startled tone, and she added, in a lower voice, "I never saw him, but I'm real sorry. It would be him that had sons—two sons?"

“That’s the maist mysterious part of a’,” said the gardener, glad of a gossip. “He had two sons—bonnie lads, and strong lads, and like life. One of them went out to India, and married a wife; but the eldest wasna of that kind. They are both dead within three weeks, the one after the other, the father and the two sons.”

A cry, subdued, but strangely piercing and full of mingled awe and terror, rang into the air. Then the gardener spoke again.

“Does anything ail ye, lass? What’s the matter? They’re no a drap’s blood to you that you should be that vexed. What are ye saying? Ay, there was a Tammas, the auldest son. They are a’ Tammasses in this house—Tammasses and Charlies; but they’re baith dead and gone! Are you greeting, lass? And what do you ken about the family? Losh me! She’s greeting like to break her heart.”

“I kent—one of the—young gentlemen,” answered the stranger, with broken sobs.

“One o’ the young gentlemen? Maister Tom was wild, I aye said it. It would be Maister

Tom. It's no to your credit, my dear, no to your credit. A poor lass should have nothing to say to a young gentleman. Maybe it was away in England? but you're no English. It might be in the Hielands. He was aye ranting about here and there, taking no thought. Now, my bonnie lass, was it in the Hielands? You needna distrust me."

"It's no matter to you nor to naebody," said the other voice.

"Miss Heriot, where are you going?" Fanshawe said, in dismay.

Marjory had risen from his side in a noiseless ghostly way, and had crossed the path under the limes to a door in the wall, which led into the other garden. She disappeared in the darkness, while he sat wondering, and immediately after he heard her speak.

"You are asking after the family. You are sorry for us in our trouble. You may go, Sandy. I want to speak to her myself. Will you tell me if—you want anything?"

"Nothing," said the other voice, with sudden and evident self-restraint. "I'm sorry to have

disturbed you, mem. I meant nothing but to ask a question on my road as I passed."

"But you knew my poor brother?"

"I've seen a Maister Heriot, that was said to come frae Fife."

"Will you come in?" said Marjory.

"I thank ye, mem, but I've nae time to waste. My errand's dune. I've a long road before me."

"If you will come with me I will let you out another way, which is shorter," said Marjory, in a conciliatory tone.

There was a momentary pause, and after some hesitating answer, Fanshawe heard the door of the other garden shut, and saw two figures come back instead of one. The new comer was shorter than Marjory. Her dress was tucked up as if for walking; but there was not light enough to distinguish her face. I think Marjory, in the new interest which possessed her, had forgotten Fanshawe. To his infinite surprise, he saw her grasp the hand of the country lass as she closed the little door in the wall, and heard her ask eagerly, in a half-whispering voice,

“Are you Isabell?”

The young woman drew back. She drew away her hand. She stood evidently on the defensive.

“I didna come here,” she said, “to tell wha or what I am. Naebody here has anything to do with me. If you’re Miss Heriot, I beg your pardon; but you’re taking too much upon you with a stranger lass, that wants naething from you.”

The listener rose to his feet; he was shocked and annoyed by what he thought the impertinence of the wayfarer, whose confidence Marjory had condescended to ask. But Marjory herself was not offended. She said hurriedly,

“Do not be afraid of me. I ask with no unkind meaning. I would not hurt you for the world. What I want is that you should trust me, and tell me your story. I will do anything in the world for you, if you are Isabell.”

There was another pause, as of consideration, and then the stranger replied,

“I canna say, mem, what you may mean. It’s

no for me to pry into your secrets, if you have secrets. There's many Isabells in the world, and that might have been my name, and me know nothing about you or yours; but my name's no Isabell, if that is any satisfaction. You said you would show me a short gait to Comlie—"

"I will," said Marjory, tremulously. They were walking slowly past Fanshawe, taking no notice of him, and with feelings that were not altogether delightful, he perceived that she had forgotten his very existence. "But you asked about my brother," she added, with soft tones of pleading, "and he is dead. Poor Tom! I want to know everybody he knew. Was it in—the Highlands? Will you tell me where you knew him? It is not for any harm—"

"Mem, I'm sorry to have put fancies in your head by my foolish question," said the resolute young woman. "What could the like of me ken of the like of him? I've seen him maybe three or four times; he was kind to some poor folk in our parish; and hearing the name on a journey, I knockit at the garden-door to ask

what had come of him. I didna ken," she added, with a quiver of emotion, which she evidently did all she could to restrain, "that he was dead. I was struck to hear it, and I'm sorry for you and all the family, with such a sore trial. If you are the only leddy, mem, I'm maist sorry for you."

"Thank you," said Marjory. "I have lost my father and both my brothers. I have nothing more left me in the world but one dear little sister. There is not a more sorrowful woman in all Scotland."

"Ah! but there is, though!" burst from the girl; and then she made a sudden pause, as if of obstinacy, and looked Marjory in the face defying her.

Once more Marjory took her hand. She wept as she spoke, pleading, crying, both at once, till Fanshawe, who was so close by, felt his heart melt within him, and could have cried too.

"Oh!" she said, "tell me who that is? I am sure you know something, though you will not tell. What can I say to show you that I am not an enemy. Do you mean Isabell?"

There was another painful pause, and once more the girl deliberated with herself.

“Wha is Isabell?” she said, at last, with a certain determination. “I ken many an Isabell that’s in no trouble, and some that are. How am I to ken wha you mean?”

“And I cannot tell you,” said Marjory, with despair. “That is all I know of her. She—knew—my brother; and so do you. She would be sorry for him, I am sure; and so are you.”

“I told you, mem,” said the other, resolutely, “my name’s no Isabell. I’m no responsible for a’ the folk that knew Mr. Heriot. I canna take upon me to answer for them. And if I said there was in Scotland a mair sorrowful woman than you could be, oh, can the like of you ever be as sorrowful as a widow woman, a poor woman, a woman with hungry bairns, and no a morsel to give them? I’ve kent such: it goes against me to hear a young lady with plenty of siller and plenty of friends make such a moan; though I’m sorry for you,” she added, after a pause, “real sorry for you too. And now will you let me see the short gait, or will I turn back and go the

gait I came? for it's getting dark, and I dinna wish to be on a strange road at night by mysel, my lane."

"Then you will not tell me anything?" said Marjory.

"I hae naething to tell you, mem," said the girl.

This strange visitor entered and disappeared through the Pitcomlie garden, while Verna was sitting at her open window, plotting and preparing all the things she would do, if—. Verna knew nothing of her, and had she known, would have been full of maidenly indignation at the idea that Marjory could notice "such creatures." Marjory, however, was of a very different mind. She led the girl through the flower-garden and through the house, anxiously guiding her to the light of the lamp in the hall, where she could see her face. She was but a comely country girl, nothing more, with fair hair twisted into a net, and a little brown hat with a plain ribbon. She might have been a respectable country servant, or a cotter's daughter. There was nothing in any way remarkable about her. She had blue eyes,

very steady and serious in their expression, and a firm mouth, which at present was closed fast, as if in fear of self-betrayal. She dropped a rustic curtsey as Marjory opened to her the great hall-door, and directed her how to go.

“You’re very kind, mem, and I beg your pardon if I wasna civil,” she said, with penitence.

Marjory stood looking after her as she disappeared into the night. Perhaps after all it was but a whim of her own, a fancy that had nothing in it. She turned away from the door with a sigh, and then the gust of chilly air which caught her from the garden, reminded her that she had left Fanshawe there, and that he must have heard all. She went slowly back to seek him, and make her apology, her mind, like the night, dark and wistful, full of chill airs and many clouds.

CHAPTER III.

IF Tom Heriot's funeral had called all the gentry of Fife to do the family honour, it may be supposed that his father's, following so soon after, and in such circumstances of aggravated distress, brought out a still greater attendance. Mrs. Murray once more sat at the Manse window, with many tears, watching the mournful procession, and wondering much whether it would have been better for him had the Laird of Pitcomlie been "resigned," or whether it was well for the old man to be thus removed quickly, that he might not have sorrow on sorrow. It seemed to her that his was the lot she would have chosen for

herself, and she thought tremulously as she wept, of her daughter in India, and prayed for her as she cried for poor Charlie Heriot. Miss Jean had not ventured this time to join Mrs. Murray at her window. The old woman was peeping from behind her blinds in the white gable, with eyes that shone at sight of the many carriages.

“Thomas Heriot may be proud,” she said to herself, confused between the two deaths, and not feeling quite sure that her nephew was not in one of the mourning coaches enjoying the melancholy grandeur of which he was himself the object. All that was honourable in Fife was there, the old gentry, and the new people of wealth, and the tenantry, and the town—even the fishers, smelling of salt water, though arrayed in the suit of “blacks” which it is a point of honour with that class to keep in readiness for a funeral. The churchyard was quite full of people, intent upon showing their respect for Pitcomlie.

It was Mr. Charles who had received and arranged all this miscellaneous assemblage.

People at his age do not mourn for each other very acutely, perhaps because the separation cannot be a long one, perhaps because that grand final event has become so ordinary an occurrence. To the young it is less familiar, less close at hand. The older one grows, the more one is disposed to represent death to one's self as an everyday incident, and old men who are themselves approaching that verge are apt to dismiss somewhat summarily those who have preceded them. Besides, a week had elapsed between Mr. Heriot's death and his funeral, and that long interval of seclusion, and absorption in one idea, is enough to take the edge of all but the most sensitive feelings. It was anxiety more than grief that sat heavy on the brow of Mr. Charles.

“We must think now of the living, not of the dead,” he had said on the previous evening.

And indeed there was reason enough to make that transference of solicitude, and to think of the living. For all the courses of nature had

been driven out of trim, and no one of the party cared to confront the position, or ask themselves what was to come of it: except indeed Verna, who thought of nothing else; but her thoughts would have been far from pleasing to the others had they known.

It was a long business to get all the sympathizing friends away, and to thank and shake hands with the distant hereditary acquaintances who once more had come so far to do honour to the Heriots. The house was in a curious excitement during this interval. All round Pitcomlie many carriages were waiting, and profuse hospitality was being dispensed by Mrs. Simpson and her maids in the servants' hall amid gossip, melancholy but consolatory.

Mr. Charles was doing his duty manfully in the dining-room, administering the excellent sherry, and making such serious remarks now and then as did not misbecome a mourner.

Marjory, with Milly at her feet, and Fanshawe, bearing her most sympathetic company, was in the drawing-room, where the shutters were still

closed, letting in mournful lines of light through their interstices upon the group. She had felt herself "obliged" last night to tell him about Isabell. She was glad to feel herself obliged to do so, for her heart was aching with a desire for counsel and sympathy; and Fanshawe had taken her confidence very differently from Mr. Charles's mode of taking it. He had been interested and touched by the letter. He had even suggested at once that this was what poor Tom had intended to speak of; and he agreed with Marjory that the visitor who had so totally declined to tell who she was, or why she came, must have been somehow connected with the unknown Isabell. The secret, which was now between them, added another delicate bond to their friendship. He sat beside her now, talking it all over; suggesting, now one way, now another, of finding out who and where Isabell was. Tom had never mentioned such a subject to him—

"Which makes me," said Fanshawe, feeling abashed even in the gloom, "have all the more confidence that you are right, Miss Heriot.

Had it been a—nothing, a—a mere levity—I don't know what words to use—he would have spoken of it; but not a serious and honourable love.”

“Indeed, I am sure you do yourself injustice,” said Marjory, even in her languor of grief, discovering, with surprise, that she was capable of a blush.

“No,” he said, humbly; “men are ashamed of what is good oftener than of what is evil.”

They were speaking low, that Milly might not share any more of the secret than was inevitable, a precaution which was vain. Milly took in every word, along with the gloom of the room and the lines of strange, pale eerie light, and the heavy, sad, and painful excitement of the moment. The scene and the story never went out of her mind; but it did not make her much wiser.

There was something about poor Tom, and something about some one called Isabell, and partial darkness and transverse lines of light, themselves so pale and dark, that they made the

gloom rather heavier. Milly sat close to Marjory's knee, holding by her dress. The child could not bear to be without a hold upon something. When she let go, she seemed to sail away through some dark world of shadows and misery, full of sounds of the distant wheels of the mourning coaches, and that solemn, dreary bustle which attends the last exit of every mortal from his earthly home. Twice in a few weeks this had occurred, and it gave a confused sense of permanency to the wretchedness, so far as the child was concerned.

To Marjory there was, perhaps — who can say? — a certain sense of fellowship and comfort in the companion with whom she could talk freely, and upon whose sympathy she could reckon, which made up for something. Little Milly, perhaps, who could not in reality feel all that happened half so deeply as her sister, was for the moment more cast down, enveloped in that vague dreariness of childhood which, while it lasts, is more deeply depressing than any maturer grief.

A very different scene was going on upstairs in the west wing, where the strangers were being clothed in their new mourning, in preparation for a solemn appearance at the reading of the will. Poor Matilda, covered with crape, and drowned in the big widow's cap, was as woe-begone as her sister could have desired, and cried more and more every time she looked in the glass.

"It is hideous with light hair," she said. "Oh! Verna, how cruel you are! They will think me eighty; they will not feel for me a bit. You know very well, when you have an unbecoming dress, men always find it out, though they never know what makes it unbecoming. And when everything depends on the impression I make, for the poor children—"

"Oh! you little fool!" said Verna, to whom it must be allowed the deep mourning, with the delicate broad hems of her collar and wrists, was very becoming; "the only impression you have to make is that you are a wretched widow, able to think of nothing but

your poor dead husband. If you had the heart of a mouse, you would be thinking of him to-day, and not of anything else."

"And so I am," said Matilda, with real tears. "He would never have made me wear this horrible thing. He liked to see me look my best, and always thought of me, and what I would like, before everything. You may be sure that so long as I am with you, who are a little tyrant to me, I shall never, never forget poor dear Charlie. And, of course, I want to look decent, for his sake. What are they to think of him, dear fellow, when they see me look such a dowdy, and with no money, nor anything. It is for Charlie's sake!"

Verna, however, was invincible even to this argument.

"There are a great many other things to think of to-day," she said. "Now, just remember what I say to you. They can't change what you are to have, because that will be settled by Mr. Heriot's will; but if you don't behave yourself as you ought, they can put

you under trustees, or something, who will pay you out so much a month, or so much a year, and make you do exactly what they please. That's what you have to be afraid of. If they think you look as if you could ever enjoy yourself again, be sure that's what they will do. I know them. If a woman looks as if she had not the heart to do a single thing, then they let her have her own way."

"Do you really think so?" cried Matilda, stopping short suddenly in her tears, and looking up to her sister with round eyes, staggered by this new suggestion.

"I am certain of it," said Verna. "And then, you know, poor Charlie's will leaves that old uncle guardian along with you. If you want to have any freedom, you must look as if you cared for nothing of the sort. And, Matty, I have just one other word to say. If you hear anything to surprise you, whatever it is, don't appear to take any notice. Now, recollect what I tell you. Don't jump up, or cry out, or make a fuss, if you hear that

you are either better off or worse off than you thought. If you are left better off than you expect, you'll see these men will try to get the upper hand, and take away your freedom, unless you look as insensible as possible; and if you are left worse off, there are always ways of working upon them with a heartbroken widow. I don't want you to be clever and understand, for you can't; but you can *cry*. Here's a lovely handkerchief I got for you expressly. It is just a little too pretty. There is a row of beautiful small work above the hemstitch—too small for other people to notice much—and it will be a comfort to you."

"Well, it *is* a beauty," said the disconsolate widow. "But all the same," she added, after a moment's pause, "I don't see why I should not understand my own business as well as you."

"Do you?" said Verna, turning round upon her, with flashing eyes.

Matilda quailed, and fell back.

"Don't look as if you were going to bite

me," she cried. "Did I ever say I did? But that is not my fault. You never will let me manage anything; even Charlie wouldn't. But he did not tell me I was a fool, as you do. He said, 'I won't have my darling bothered!' Oh! dear Charlie! what I lost when I lost you!"

"That was a pleasanter way of putting it," said Verna, grimly; and then she, too, softened, and a glimmer of moisture came into the eyes which would have been fine eyes had they not been somewhat hard and beady. "He was a fool, too," she said; "a fool about you, as men are; but he *was* a dear fellow. You pink-and-white creatures have all the luck; you get men to be fond of you that are far too good for you, while people who could understand them—"

Matilda interrupted her with a low laugh.

"You were always envious of me," she said; and with her complaisance restored, and her pretty handkerchief in her hand, she made herself comfortable on the sofa, waiting the summons to go downstairs.

Poor little Tommy was *affublé*, like the rest, with paramatta and crape. He had a large sash of the latter material, which had the air of a hump and two tails behind; and the paleness of the little Indian child came out with double effect from this heavy framework. Verna's quick eye noticed this, and felt that much was to be made of Tommy. She posed him at his mother's knee, and contemplated the group, and felt that no cruel trustee, no hard-hearted guardian, could stand against them. When she reflected that the guardian was only Mr. Charles, she felt triumphant. He certainly would never oppose her. And now the moment of fate approached; soon it would be decided whether Verna, by Tommy's means, was to have it; or, if—

What a relief it would have been to her mind, had she known that the estate was entailed, and that even Mr. Heriot's will could do nothing against that! but whether it is for want of education or not, certain it is that women know very little about such matters; and Verna's fine intellect was hampered by her

ignorance. She knew nothing about the laws of entail, or whether a man could change them at his will and pleasure. She felt that the possible gain was so great, that there must be some evil possibility in the way, which would make an end of it. And this sense of a tremendous decision about to be made, wound Verna up to the highest pitch of excitement. She looked handsome, though she was not regularly handsome—almost beautiful in her emotion; her eyes sparkled, her colour was high, and the smile, which usually was too complacent, was swept away from her face altogether, leaving only an animated readiness to change in a moment from grave to gay, from calm to triumphant. Her heart was beating under her new black gown as it had never beat in her life before. She had not lived till now, it is true, without some little movements of the heart—but none of them had at all approached in interest to this.

At last the summons came. With one final imploring supplication to Matilda to do nothing but cry, and to Tommy to be a good boy,

she gave her sister her arm with every appearance of sympathy, and held out her other hand to be grasped by Tommy, who, being short, preferred her dress, to which he clung as for life and death. The maids stood admiring and sympathetic on the stairs, as this procession stole softly down. Tommy was whimpering with fright; Matilda put up her beautiful handkerchief to hide her face; only Verna was composed and sublime, supporting her widowed sister. In the darkened library, which was, like the drawing-room, full of lines of ghostly light from the joints of the shutters, everybody stood up as this group entered, and all hearts were filled with a certain thrill of sympathy. The chief places were given to the young widow and her sister. All the others seemed to group round them as a natural centre.

Mr. Charles stood with his back to the fire, interrupting the light which came from it by his long legs. He was very tired and very anxious, not knowing what the future was to bring forth for those most dear to him, and

looking at the new-comers in the gloom which hid the expressions of their faces, with a wistful eagerness which was stronger than curiosity. Nothing that happened could affect him personally, nor was he without the means to give Marjory a home; but there were more things involved than mere maintenance, and however things might turn out, it was certain that the whole family was on the eve of some painful change.

Marjory sat behind backs, very silent, not so much interested as any one else present, not caring much what happened. In no circumstances was it probable that she could have cared much for the mere personal consideration of how much was or was not left to her; and the idea of being compelled to leave Pitcomlie, and to give up all the habits and occupations of her life, had not occurred to her. I doubt whether, even had it occurred to her, the effect upon her mind would have been greater. The only thing that interested her specially was Tom's secret, the unknown story to which she seemed to have been

brought closer last evening; and it was this which was going dimly, vaguely through her mind, while the others were occupied with things so much more immediately present and real.

Milly, as usual, was on a stool by her feet, pressing her golden hair against her sister's black dress; and Fanshawe stood near, behind the back of her chair, unseen, scarcely thought of, yet giving a certain subtle support. He had no right whatever to be here. The lawyer, Mr. Smeaton, from Edinburgh, had put on his spectacles to look at him, as he might have done had he been a big beetle conspicuously out of place. Even Mr. Charles had hesitated a little before he said, "Are you coming with us, Mr. Fanshawe?"

Fanshawe would not have accepted so very uncordial an invitation to intrude into family mysteries in any other house; but this (he said to himself) was not like any other house; and Marjory had half turned round to look if he was following. Was not that reason enough? He felt somewhat uneasy when he found him-

self there, and in a false position. He got as far out of the way as possible, behind her chair. And then it gleamed across him that the others might inquire what right he had to stand behind Marjory's chair? No right! not even the right of an honest intention, a real purpose. He meant nothing; the tie between the two was entirely fortuitous, without intention on either side. What right had he to be there?

CHAPTER IV.

MR. HERIOT'S will was an old one. As it was read, some of the listeners held their breaths with the strangest painful feeling of anachronism and sense of being suddenly plunged back into an ended world. Little Milly, wistful and dreary, cried at the merest mention that was made of her brothers' names. She was the one of all who had least personal knowledge of her brothers; but their names had become symbols of grief to her. The others listened with much outward quietness and internal excitement, while all the stipulations of that will which the father had made in full certainty of being survived by his sons, was read in the

light of the fact that both his sons had preceded him to the grave.

The will set forth that there was twenty thousand pounds to be divided between the younger children; but that little Milly being provided for in chief by her mother's fortune, only three thousand was to be given to her, the rest being divided between the son Charles and the daughter Marjory of the testator. Mr. Smeaton paused to explain that this sum would not be fully realized, as some part of the property from which it was to be drawn had much deteriorated in value; and went into further detailed descriptions of the property, and the cause of its deterioration, which tried Verna's patience to the utmost, and made Mr. Charles cross and uncross his long legs in nervous impatience.

Even wills, however, come to an end some time. When this was ended there was a pause. There were no unexpected stipulations, no wrong done to any one; all was perfectly just, kind, and fatherly. But this was not all. Except Matilda, who knew nothing, everyone in the

room stirred with uneasy expectation when the reading came to an end. Matilda, for her part, obeyed her sister's directions closely; but that did not prevent her from making an anxious calculation in her mind how much was left of twenty thousand pounds when you subtracted three, and how much was the half of seventeen thousand. This was a mental operation which took her a long time and much thought, and she had not arrived at the other and more difficult and, in short, utterly insoluble question as to what income eight thousand five hundred pounds would produce, when Mr. Charles spoke.

“Is there no later will?” he said; “nothing made since the late sad changes in the family? no codicil? He might have made some memorandum, perhaps, of what he wanted to be done in the present melancholy case.”

“Nothing at all,” said Mr. Smeaton; “it was not a case to be foreseen. Such a thing, I daresay, never entered into his head. Since both are gone, this poor little fellow must, of course, be named heir of entail, and guardians

appointed—unless his father has appointed guardians.”

“Not likely, not likely,” said Mr. Charles; and both of the gentlemen looked at Matilda, who, thinking that she had done something wrong, hid her face in her handkerchief. This produced, as Verna expected, the most excellent effect.

“Poor young creature!” they said to each other. “It is too much for her, and no wonder.”

“Miss Basset,” Mr. Charles added, gently, “perhaps you could rouse your sister a little to the necessities of her position. You know that in consequence of the death of my two nephews, Tom and Charlie, all the bulk of the property goes to that poor infant at your feet. Poor little man! You understand me? I daresay you have not thought on the subject, either of you. Poor little Tommy is the actual proprietor of Pitcomlie. It will be a great responsibility for his mother. Do you think you can make her understand?”

Matilda’s handkerchief, which she held to her

face, was violently jerked by the start she gave. There are some minds which are quick to self-interest, though dull to most things else. Mrs. Charles was of slow intelligence, but she heard and understood this. For a moment she made an effort to obey her sister; but then nature got the better of her. She flung the handkerchief on the floor, and appeared from under it, flushed and tearless.

“What!” she cried, with a suppressed but sharp scream.

The reality of her voice amid this subdued and conventional quiet, roused them all up like a flash of lightning; and Verna herself, for the moment, was too much overcome to interfere.

“Did she not know?” said Mr. Smeaton, aside, to Mr. Charles. “The fact is, the deaths of your brother-in-law and your husband, Mrs. Charles, have left your little boy the actual proprietor of Pitcomlie. Had I supposed that you did not know, I would have broken the news more gently—”

“Tommy!” cried his mother. “Tommy! Do

you mean it all belongs to us—all? this house, and the money, and everything? Oh, Tommy! Are you sure—are you quite sure? Can't you be making a mistake? These things so often turn out to be mistakes; I should not like to believe it, and then find out it was not true."

Verna advanced with a warning air; but her sister pushed her away.

"Let me alone, Verna; it is my business and Tommy's. Please go on, go on. I can understand everything. Oh! make haste and tell me! All Tommy's!—and Tommy, of course, mine, being but a baby. Is it true?"

"It is true, so far as Tommy is concerned," said the lawyer, with a smile; "but for his mother—"

"There is a paper," cried Matilda; "Charlie signed a paper. Verna, you have it; where is it, that last paper Charlie signed? You made him do it. I remember I thought it was silly, for what could it matter? It is something about me and the children. Give it to

Uncle Charles; he is in it, too. Dear me! you are quick enough sometimes," said poor Matilda, in vulgar triumph. "Do not keep everybody waiting; where is it now?"

Verna put herself between her sister and the critical eyes that were, she supposed, inspecting her, and picking up the fallen handkerchief, restored it to its owner.

"Be quiet, for heaven's sake," she cried.

"Oh, why should I be quiet, I should like to know?" cried Matilda. "Don't stand between me and the people. If I am mistress of the house, I mean to be so, and put up with no nonsense. She has got the paper all right. Tommy, my precious darling! You shall have the nicest things money can buy. You shall never go to school, my precious, like common little nasty boys. You shall have——"

"Oh, you fool!" shrieked Verna, in her ear.

At the sound of these familiar words, and the suppressed vehemence with which they were spoken, Matilda for the moment came to her-

self. She looked round, and saw the wondering faces turned towards her. She saw suddenly that she had abandoned her *consigne*, and had got into deep waters, which she could not fathom; and with a certain natural cunning, which her sister blessed, she suddenly fell a crying in her excitement. Then Verna began to breathe; the ball was again in her hands.

“Poor Charlie was very anxious about his wife and his children before he died,” she said, “as was very natural, for he did not know if his father would approve of his coming home. He had not anything to leave, poor fellow, but he made his will. Here it is. It was partly his doing and partly mine, as my sister says. I brought it in case it should be wanted. Whatever Tommy—I mean the children—may have, he made her their guardian. My sister is very excitable”—Here Verna paused, as if forced to make some explanation. “She was afraid there would be nothing for the children. The revulsion has been too much——”

“Mrs. Charles seems, I think, quite able to

speak for herself," said Mr. Smeaton. "This is the will of Charles Heriot, dated at sea, the 21st March. It's worth very little, I may tell you. It is quite informal. If the family choose to accept and act upon it, I have nothing to say; but otherwise it is good for nothing. It leaves everything of which he dies possessed to his widow, and appoints her and his uncle, Charles Hay-Heriot, of George Square, Edinburgh, the guardians of his children. That's so far well; it is a judicious appointment enough—unless," stooping his head, and speaking lower, he added, "unless the family think it proper to dispute it, when it is a simple piece of waste paper. It all depends upon what you think, ay or no."

There was a pause. Matilda's interposition had made a painful impression upon Uncle Charles.

"What could we do?" he said, in an undertone.

"You could dispute this, and have guardians appointed by the court," said Mr. Smeaton. "But as you're named, and all's right otherwise, I do not see much reason why——"

Matilda heard this low conversation, but she did not know what it was about. She thought, like every narrow intelligence, that what she did not understand must be against her. And her feelings overcame her prudence and her awe of Verna.

“What are you all talking about?” she said, vehemently, sitting up quite upright in the chair which she had been reclining in. “What are you doing, plotting and scheming against my boy? You cannot take his birthright from him. Do you think I will stay quiet, as Verna tells me. Verna, hold your tongue, it is I that am the mistress, when my Charlie’s will is being torn up, and our estate taken from us. No, I will not stay quiet. We must have our rights.”

“Do not mind her, gentlemen,” said Verna, piteously. “She is excited; she is never like this when she understands. Matilda, dear, no one is thinking of wronging you. It was this gentleman who explained how things are. They will appoint another guardian, and take away your authority, if you don’t mind. Be quiet, or

they will take away your freedom. Matty! if they see you are excited and so forth, they will not let you have any of the power. Do you hear what I say? They cannot wrong you, but they will make you a slave; they will take away all your power."

This was said in a passionate whisper, close to Matilda's ear, who gazed at the speaker, open-eyed, first defiant, then gradually yielding.

"They are not to do anything against Tommy's rights. I will not stand and see my child lose his rights," she cried.

Verna sat down beside her, and took her hand, and carried on a close conversation in a whisper. It became half Hindustanee as it became vehement. The lawyer and Mr. Charles, after a moment's pause, made themselves into a separate group, and talked over the papers; while Marjory and little Milly behind, with Fanshawe looking on, formed another. The central point of the scene was in the two young women, full of excitement and passion, who were strangers, whom the house knew nothing of, and

who yet were its future mistresses, with the wondering little boy in crape standing between them, holding fast by each, and gazing out with round eyes upon the strangers who filled him with a frightened defiance. You will think it strange that Marjory had no yearning of the heart towards this baby, who was Charlie's son; but, as children have a perverse way of doing in such circumstances, little Tommy had not a feature which recalled Charlie. He was his mother's little staring image, her face, her expression, the very repetition of her look. Milly's heart was moved to him for the sole reason that he was "little;" but Marjory remained cold as the nether millstone to Charlie's boy. She sat, indeed, very coldly during the whole discussion. It sounded to her like a storm going on at a distance, which disturbs no one—the thunder mere echo, the lightning nothing but reflection. She looked at the two who were moved by feelings so much stronger than her own with a vague surprise, which only the curious stupor which hung about her could explain. She did not enter into their feelings.

She was antagonistic to them, yet saw that but faintly. The whole scene seemed a dream, which would float away, leaving—what? Marjory's mind did not seem even active enough to inquire what it would leave behind.

Thus this strange scene ended, and everybody at Pitcomlie knew that a change—the greatest ever known in its records—had come about in the fortunes of the race. Other widowed ladies had reigned in the old house before now, but they had been kindly daughters of the country-side, trained in its traditions, and knowing what was expected of them. The new mistress was a stranger, knowing neither Fife nor Scotland, nor even English ways, knowing nothing about the family, nor what it demanded from her, and caring less than she knew. Mr. Charles, with care on his brow, took a “turn” with Mr. Smeaton on the cliff. They discussed the matter very seriously, but they did not make much of it one way or another.

“If young Charlie's will stands, you will have to manage all the money matters,” Mr. Smeaton said, “which will be the best thing for the

estate; and perhaps you'll be able to get an influence over the widow. She'll give you a great deal of trouble, that young woman; but, on the other hand, she will understand nothing about business, and you will get your own way; whereas, if the will is cancelled as informal, you'll have another guardian appointed who may take different views; and she'll give plenty of trouble all the same."

"She's young," said Mr. Charles, with careful looks; "she'll learn better; but I'm an old man—too old to manage a child's property, that will not come of age for eighteen years."

"Toots!" said Mr. Smeaton; "you're not sixty. What ails you to live till the laddie's of age? there's plenty of your name have done it before you."

"My brother was but sixty-one," said Mr. Charles.

"Ay, ay; but the circumstances are different, they cannot occur again. On the whole, if I were in your place, I would stand by young Charlie's will."

This was the subject of conversation with the

elders of the party, as the Spring afternoon came to an end; very different from their subdued doubtfulness and care were the feelings of Matilda and her sister as they went upstairs. Matilda, for her part, did not want to go upstairs at all.

“I want to see the house,” she said. “It is my own house now, and I have a right to see it. I don’t see why I should be shut up in a bedroom—the mistress of the house!”

“Come along for to-day; we are to go down to dinner!” said Verna. “How could you see the house when all the shutters are closed, and everything shut up?”

“Let them open it, then!” said Matilda. “It has been shut up long enough—a whole week. What would anyone think of that in India?” But finally she allowed herself to be persuaded to go back to her room, as Tommy wanted his tea. When she reached that sanctuary, she plucked the cap from her head, and tossed it to the other end of the room. “That shall never go on again!” she cried. “Now I am my own mistress, I don’t see why I should

make myself hideous for anybody. You need not look shocked, Verna; you need not say a word. There are some things I won't do. I mean to be a good sister to you, and give you everything you want, but I won't have you sit upon me, and tell me what I am to do. You may be the cleverest, but I'm Tommy's mother, and I have the power to do what I like—and I will, too!" she cried, letting down her bright locks, which had been simply fastened behind to admit of the covering of the cap. "Quick, Elvin, bring me all my pads and hairpins, and do up my hair decently. I won't go down to dinner a fright; you can put it on if you like, since you are so fond of it," she said, with a mocking laugh, as her sister picked up the unfortunate cap. Verna was not so happy as her sister; she had never been thus defied by Matilda before. Her brilliant hopes of sovereignty were overcast. If this rebellion was to continue, all her plans would be put out of joint. It was with a very rueful countenance that she picked up the discarded headgear, and looked on at the wonderful edifice of fair hair that was being built up over

Matilda's low but white forehead. "I have not felt so comfortable since we left Calcutta," said that young woman, with a sigh of relief as she looked at herself in the glass. "Crape is not unbecoming when it is fresh; and, thank heaven, one can always have it fresh now."

"You speak as if you were glad you were a widow; you never think of poor Charlie!" cried Verna, in her discomfiture—glad to have some means of inflicting a sting.

"Oh, you cruel, unkind thing! as if I did not miss him every hour," said Matilda, with the ready tribute of tears which sprang up at a moment's notice. "He never would have allowed you to bully me as you do; he never asked me to do anything I didn't like; never called me a fool, as you do."

"He must have thought it many a time," said Verna spitefully.

"He did not; he was very fond of me—and I was fond of him, very fond of him!" cried Matilda; "but do you think he would have liked me to be tyrannized over, to make myself look

hideous?—never. He would have liked to see me at the head of the table—”

Verna had not very fine or fastidious taste; but she had sense enough to perceive when anything was offensively out of harmony with the courtesies of life. She cried:

“For heaven’s sake, Matty—for Charlie’s sake, not to-night!”

“We shall see about that,” said Matilda, complacently nodding her head; “it is for Charlie’s sake, poor fellow; he married me without any money, or great connections, or anything. And I want them to see I am not such a dowdy, nor so plain, nor so insignificant as they think. For Charlie’s sake, and to do him credit, poor fellow, I am determined to be mistress in my own house.”

Verna was struck dumb; she was cast from her height of hope, and the fall stunned her. It was of no use now to call her sister a fool, though she was proving herself so in the most violent manner. Folly is not always obedient and submissive; there are times when it takes the upper hand, and then there is nothing so impossible as

to move it one way or another. Poor Verna, in her little pride of cleverness, was actually cowed by the unexpected force of the heartless idiocy which she despised. It was stronger than she in that grand primitive power of unreason, which is strong enough to confuse the best intellect, and break the stoutest heart in the world.

CHAPTER V.

THE drawing-room was but dimly lighted when the party at Pitcomlie assembled in it for dinner, and Matilda had been so little seen as yet, that the absence of her widow's cap made but little impression upon the small silent company. She came in, feeling somewhat triumphant, with her pretty hair rising in billows from the low white brow, which people had told her was like that of a classic statue. There was very little that was classic about poor Matilda, but she liked this praise. It sounded lofty and elevated; nobody had ever called her clever—but this seemed to approach or even to exceed the point of cleverness. After a momentary pause,

Mr. Charles offered her his arm. He was about to place her at his own right hand at the foot of the table, as became a visitor. Matilda, however, stood holding him fast until all the party had entered the room. Then she said, looking round upon the company, "To save inconvenience don't you think I had better take my proper place at once?" and marched the unfortunate old uncle up to the head of the table. There she spread herself out complacent and delighted. "I always think when there is a change to be made it had better be done at once," she said, beaming with a triumphant smile, with her jet ornaments twinkling in the light, upon the astounded party.

They were so entirely taken by surprise that a moment's confusion occurred, no one knowing where to place him or herself. Mr. Charles, helpless and amazed, was pinned to Matilda's side. To her other hand, Mr. Smeaton quietly looking on and enjoying the joke, led Verna, who was crimson with painful blushes, and not daring to lift her eyes. Marjory was the last to perceive the alteration that had

been made. She was about to pass on to her usual place, when Fanshawe quietly stopped her, and placed her at the foot of the table. She looked up with an astonished glance, and met the triumphant eyes of the new mistress from its head. I am doubtful whether Marjory at the moment fully realized what it was. She gave a surprised look round, and then a smile passed over her face—could anyone suppose she cared for this? It hurt her a great deal less than it did Verna, who was her natural antagonist; but who thought it the most dreadful “solecism,” and wondered what people would think. “They will think we are nobodies, and know nothing,” Verna said to herself, and scarcely ventured to hold up her head. The company in general, indeed, was taken by such surprise that there was no conversation for a few minutes. Fleming’s face as he placed himself behind Mrs. Charles’s chair was a study of consternation and dismay. He carried the dishes to Marjory first, and pulled her sleeve and whispered,

“You’ll no be heeding? the woman’s daft, Miss Marjory, you’re no heeding?” with an

anxiety which regained him his character in Fanshawe's eyes.

"It is quite right," said Marjory in the same undertone. "She is the mistress of the house, she was quite right. It is best she should take her place at once."

Fleming marched round the table, shaking his head. He groaned when he served the new mistress. He called her Mistress Charles till her patience was exhausted.

"Please to call me Mrs. Heriot," she said angrily.

"Oh aye, Mistress Charles," said Fleming, "will ye take some chicken or some mutton?"

"If you do not call me by my right name I will send you away," cried Matilda. She was "daft," as he said, or rather intoxicated with satisfaction and triumph.

"You can do that, Mistress Charles," said the old man indifferently, going on with his service. Deeper and deeper blushed poor Verna. Oh, what solecisms! what ignorance of the world! She did not know whether she should refrain from noticing, or whether she ought

to excuse and explain her sister's conduct, The first was the most difficult, especially as her companion, the lawyer, looked on with suppressed amusement, and noted everything. Then Matilda began to entertain her neighbours on her other side.

“Is that gentleman—I don't know his name—at the foot of the table, a relation?” she asked.

“No,” said Mr. Charles, who was just now coming to the surface after his consternation, “his name is Fanshawe, he is a friend of poor Tom's.”

“Then he is engaged to Marjory, I suppose?”

“No,” repeated Mr. Charles once more, still more blankly; and then he looked down to the other end of the table, where certainly Mr. Fanshawe was talking very eagerly to his niece, and added, “Not so far as I know.”

“Ah, young ladies are sometimes sly in those sort of affairs,” said Mrs. Charles. “I should think Marjory was one of the sly ones. Now I never can hide what I feel; but I suppose Marjory is a great deal cleverer than I.”

Mr. Charles made no reply. He glanced at her confounded, without a word to say. Was this the little thing that had looked so gentle, and cried so bitterly? He was at his wrong end of the table, everybody and everything were out of their proper places. He was suddenly made into a visitor, he who had been at home here all his life.

“Where do you live, Mr. Heriot?” said Mrs. Charles, “it is dreadful to know so little about the family; but I always was an ignorant little thing. It would be so kind if you would tell me about everybody.”

“Where do I live?” he said, “I have lived here most of my life—it is a difficult question to answer; though of course I have my house in George’s Square.”

“Where is that?” she asked; but waiting for no answer, added suddenly with an innocent look of curiosity, “and will Marjory live with you?”

“Matty!” cried Verna in an agony; nothing but solecisms! she thought.

“Would you think Verna was much older

than I?" said Matilda, turning to the lawyer. "She thinks I ought to do everything she tells me; but when once a woman has been married, nobody has a right to tell her what to do except her husband. Don't you think so? One always knows one's own affairs best."

"It is common to say so," said the lawyer; "but for my part, I think we are all most clever in managing our neighbours' affairs."

This speech puzzled Matilda, who was silent for a moment. The party was so small, and the others talked so little, that these brilliant remarks were heard by everybody, except, perhaps, the questions about Fanshawe, which she had had the grace to make in a somewhat lower tone. Even Verna was so paralyzed by the whole proceeding, and by her sister's unparalleled audacity, that she had entirely lost her conversational powers. She plucked up a little courage now, and made an effort to regain the lead which she had lost.

“It is such a loss to go to India so young as we did,” she said; “we make no acquaintance with our own country. Our ways are all Indian. We are as bad as the Americans for asking questions. The reason is that we are always meeting new people in India. We should not know anything about them if we did not ask.”

This speech raised Verna very much in the lawyer's opinion. It was clever, he thought, and good-natured, shielding the fool of a sister.

“I am sure you will be able to be of great service to Mrs. Heriot,” he said, in an undertone. “Your good sense will show what is best. It may be a difficult business, and your brother-in-law's will is not worth a snuff if the family choose to oppose it. So she must not try their patience, you see, for old Charles Heriot, though very pleasant in his manner, is an old Turk when he's opposed. There is no saying what he might do,” said Mr. Smeaton, enjoying the slander which he was uttering within hearing almost of the person assailed,

“if his blood was up; and if your sister was to show any—well, incivility is a hard word, but you know what I mean—to Miss Marjory, Charles Heriot would take fire. You must advise her, Miss Basset; you must advise her. Hoolie and fairly, as we say in Scotland, or as the Italians have it, *Chi va piano va sano*.” These words Mr. Smeaton pronounced as if they were broad Scotch; but Verna did not understand them, so it made little difference to her. And he added, “Everything here is long established, and hard to root up. You’ll have to make your changes with great discretion, and take time to them. Everything will be made more difficult for you if auld Charles Heriot should take fire at any little affront, and flare up.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times for your advice!” cried Verna. “It is exactly my own opinion, and what I have said to her over and over. But I did not know Mr. Charles Heriot was so hot-tempered; he looks mild enough.”

“The very deevil—if you’ll excuse the

word," said Mr. Smeaton, "when his blood's up."

Perhaps Verna was the only one who was sorry when that dinner was over. She was anxious for advice, and to be thus fortified seemed to her of the greatest importance; and she received with religious faith those valuable hints about Mr. Charles Heriot's temper, among other things. When the ladies left the table, she tried hard to persuade Matilda to go to her room, under pretext of fatigue; but the young widow was obdurate.

"I want to see the house," she said, making her way, sweeping and rustling in her crape, to the drawing-room. Marjory followed, still with very little feeling of what had happened. But even Marjory was conscious of some painful feeling when she saw her sister-in-law laid luxuriously upon the little sofa in the bow-window, which was her own particular seat.

"Indeed, it is very comfortable," said Matilda. "You know how to be comfortable. This is your favourite place, is it not, Marjory? Poor

Charlie used to tell me of the bow-window, and how it was made for you."

"Yes, I was fond of it," said Marjory.

"Then I hope you will always feel you have a right to it when you come to see me," said Mrs. Charles. "We shall change some things, no doubt; but you will always be welcome, Marjory. I suppose you are to be married soon. You may think it would hurt my feelings to hear of a wedding, being a widow myself; but I am not so selfish. I am sure I congratulate you; he looks very nice indeed."

"There is nothing to congratulate me about," said Marjory.

It was hard upon her to hear the conversation between the sisters which followed, about new curtains and chairs that were necessary. It was not Verna's fault, who gave piteous, conciliatory looks at the daughter of the house. She bore it all as long as she could, and then she went noiselessly outside upon the cliff. The Spring was very mild that year. This was again a lovely night, with a faint blue sky all sprinkled

with stars, and the vague, half-seen sea beneath, which sent up long sighing waves upon the rocks, not loud, but full of pensive moaning. There was a young moon shining, a moon covered with fleecy white clouds like a veil. Through the softened night rose the white rock of the May, with its steady light ; and the light-house further off which Marjory knew so well, and which had so often turned and thrown a pleasant gleam at her across the broad waters, gleamed out all at once as she strayed round the well-known path. It was, perhaps, only Mrs. Charles's gracious intimation that she would always be welcome, which roused her to the sense that the time was approaching when she must leave this dear old home. It was not in Marjory's nature to make a lesser grief into a great one ; and she had endured so much, that this additional trouble was not heavy to her, as it would have been in other circumstances. But it gave her a certain sore feeling of pain and loss in the midst of her heavier burdens. It seemed hard to have such a subject thrust all at once, without a moment's

notice, upon her. Her heart felt sore, as if a sudden new thrust had been made at it; sore with a feeling of resentment and impatient vexation. She strayed along the familiar round, the "turn" which she had taken so often, hearing now and then the voices through the half-open window; voices higher pitched and more shrill than any native to this locality. Even that difference of tone seemed somehow unreasonably offensive to her. She chid herself for the foolish feeling; but how could she help it? The moon gleamed softly upon the old Manor-house and on Mr. Charles's tower; there was a glimmer of half-dying firelight making his windows visible. Had Marjory known that her successor, Verna, had already planned in her mind how to pull all those ruins down!

She had not been thinking of Fanshawe, nor of any one, when he joined her suddenly; her thoughts had been all vague, full of that soreness which was almost a relief from the heavy stupor of her grief. She had seemed to herself, not suffering actively, but stupid in sadness; sad,

sad down to the bottom of her heart; a state of mind not without a certain repose in it, which this other sensation of being wounded and injured shot across, now and then, like a thrill of life. But it seemed very natural to her when Fanshawe came to her side, more natural even than if it had been Uncle Charles. He held out his arm, and she took it only half consciously, and with a kind of faint pleasure allowed him to lead her to the edge of the cliff, where the sea-line was visible, with the Isle of May rising well out of the waters, and the twinkling lights along Comlie shore marking out the length of the little town. Her heart was overwhelmed with this profound and gentle sadness; and yet there was a pleasure in it, too.

“Miss Heriot,” said Fanshawe; “I want to have you a little while to myself, to-night. This is no place for me any longer. I must go away.”

“It is no place for any of us,” said Marjory, instinctively adopting him into the number of those who belonged to her. They were so few now.

But he took no advantage of this inference. He took it for granted, simply as she did. Perhaps he pressed her hand a little closer to his side; but if so, the action was involuntary.

“No,” he said, “it is no place for you. This piece of impertinence to-night—”

“I never thought of it,” said Marjory; “it was nothing; that could not make any difference; but we must go.”

“It is selfish of me to say anything,” he said; “but it is I who must go first—not the same man who came here a month ago, Miss Heriot; just a month—though it might be an hour, or it might be a year. It has separated my life into two pieces. May I write to you after I have managed to take myself away?”

“Surely,” she said, in her gentlest tone.

“And will you write to me? I have no right to ask it; but you are—different, somehow. You know how little I am good for. I don’t mean to make any professions to you now—to say you have made me better. Perhaps I am past making better. I should like to try, first; but if

you would write now and then, just three words—”

“Certainly I will write,” she said, looking frankly in his face. “How much you have been to us all this terrible time! Do you think I can ever forget it? And it is not only that we owe you a day in harvest—as we Scotch folk say—but people cannot feel with each other as we have done, and then cease and forget each other. Certainly I will write; it will be one of my pleasures.”

He held her hand tight in his arm; his heart was beating vaguely with many half-formed impulses. But even if anything like love had been ripe in him, it would have seemed profanation at that moment. He only held her hand closer to his side where his heart was stirring so strangely, and said—

“You make me almost happy—if it was possible to be happy in going away. I suppose I shall never come back—absolutely back here, to Pitcomlie; but we shall see each other? It is not a parting, this—only for the moment? say you think so, to cheer me.”

“I hope so!” she said. She was franker, more

open than he was ; but she was much less agitated. It was to her an easy thing to believe in this future meeting, because she wished for it without any passionate desire. But he longed for assurance, and doubted even while he affirmed ; for it seemed to him as if his whole future was dark and uncertain till that moment should come.

“ How good it is to hear you say so ! ” he said. “ If you hope for it, it will come to pass. I have not so much faith in my own prayers.”

“ Alas ! the things I have hoped for have not come to pass,” she said, with a little outburst of sorrow. And then, when her brief fit of weeping was over (he would have liked so to have taken her into his arms, to have had her sob on his breast—but dared not), she looked up to him again with a faint smile. “ I have got so used to cry and show you all my weakness,” she said ; “ how I shall miss you ! It is luxury to have some one by who will not be impatient of one’s tears.”

This, however, was getting too much for poor Fanshawe ; his heart was melting in his breast.

It was all he could do to keep from some foolish demonstration or other. He had put his other hand on hers where it lay on his arm; he bent over her, stooping his head towards her—almost carried away by the tide of emotion in him. He felt that to save himself, and to save the sanctity of this last meeting, he must fly as long as he was able.

“May I say good-bye to you here?” he said, trembling; “I must go to-morrow. You will write to me about everything? about Milly, and Mr. Charles—and the book—and about Isabell, if you find out anything more; but chiefly, and above all, about yourself—you promise? Then good-bye, and God bless you; you will say the same to me?”

“God bless you!” she said, moved by his emotion, looking at him with tears still in her eyes; “God bless you, dear friend, and good-bye.”

He stood a moment irresolute, hanging over her; holding both her hands—not knowing very well what he did. If there had been light enough to show his face, they never could have parted so. But he knew he was not seen, and felt as if he

had concealed his feelings. At that last moment he stooped suddenly, and kissed her hair just where it was parted; and then dropped her hands and disappeared—she could not tell where.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day after a great event is, in all kinds of circumstances, a difficult one. The remains of great excitement, not yet quite spent, make the air heavy, and produce innumerable little explosions like half-exhausted fireworks. Common life is feeble, and fills with lassitude people who have been living at high pressure; and the mixture of weariness, oppression, and lingering excitement is hostile to every attempt at settling down. This was the state of the atmosphere at Pitcomlie after the long strain was over, after the shutters were opened, the blinds drawn up, and ordinary existence had re-commenced. And besides this inevitable and feverish dull-

ness, there was all the excitement of half completed events to intensify the painfulness of the pause. The former inhabitants of the house did not know what step to take first; the new possessors were equally doubtful. Neither liked to make the first movement. They avoided each other, yet were compelled to meet.

Mr. Charles spent the morning in his room, pondering over the situation with many troublesome thoughts. To tear himself away from this familiar place was painful to him; but that was not all. To leave the home of his fathers in the hands of these two young women, who were altogether strangers to the race, was more painful still. The one, he said to himself, was a selfish fool, utterly incapable of comprehending the interests of the young heir, or of adapting herself to the life that was best for him; the other Mr. Charles had not been able to fathom. He thought her a sensible sort of girl, that might keep her sister out of mischief. He had put all his beloved papers in order, feeling that his work might be interrupted; but these very papers belonged to the house of Pitcomlie; he

could not take them away with him any more than he could take the old walls. What was he to do? His work would come to an end—the occupation of his life. He would have to go and seek a new home at his age—find a new refuge for all those accumulations of art which it was so pleasant for him to think he had added to the attractions of the old house. He sat down, and sighed over them at one moment, feeling the change impossible; and then he would rise, stimulated by some recollection of last night, and push the engravings together into their portfolios, and hunt for the covers of the cases in which his curiosities were set forth. Where could he take them to? His own house in George Square certainly was ready for their reception and his, but the idea did not attract him. He was not fond of his own house. It had no associations, no recollections except those of a dreary week now and then which he had spent in it alone. Mr. Charles was a born old bachelor, but he was as little used to being alone as any paterfamilias. His brother's children had been brought up at his feet, he had possessed

the delightful privilege of interfering with their education, laying down laws for them, finding fault with them, interfering and commenting, without any responsibility. No privilege could have been more delightful to him than this; and when he had now and then returned for a few days to his own house, he had been, as it were, a banished man. To be sure if he went to his own house now, he could take the only remaining children of the family with him, and make a home for himself by their means; but this brought in the element of responsibility which he feared, and of which up to this moment he had kept clear. No wonder that Mr. Charles closed his portfolios hurriedly, and sat down in his chair with a sigh. If only any means could be thought of, any device fallen upon, for compromising the matter, and keeping things as they were.

Marjory, strangely enough, was infinitely less sensitive. Though she had no other home, and had never contemplated another—though it was impossible to her to realize the fact that she was no longer mistress of Pitcomlie, yet the

possibility of change affected her much less strongly. Her whole being seemed to be dulled and slower of perception. She sent away the servants who came to her as usual for orders, and felt no pain. She even arranged her books and her papers for going away, without any sharp sense of the hardship of leaving her home. She had no particular feeling of any kind. Life seemed to be running low in her, and sometimes grief plucked at her heart; but for other emotions, she did not seem to have any. The thing she felt most was, that she missed something. What was it? Something she had been used to had slid from her. There was a vague want which she could not, and perhaps did not, wish to identify. Fanshawe had gone away that morning. She had been moved by his leave-taking, almost more than she thought seemly in her circumstances. She had a strong feeling of what was fit and natural, and the curious vague excitement with which his last looks and words filled her, seemed strangely out of place, and even wrong. She repressed the feeling with a strong hand; but she did not suspect that

the blank sense of inability to feel anything which had crept over her could be connected with that repression in any way. She was dull, dull to the depths of her heart and to the tips of her fingers. Nothing seemed to affect her. As for the little vexations of the household, the transference of her powers, these moved her no more than pin-pricks. She was quite ready to have gone away, and would not have felt it. When she was called downstairs by an intimation that Miss Jean was seen coming up to the great door to visit the family, she obeyed the call without any particular sentiment. Matilda and her sister were both in the drawing-room when Marjory went in, and Miss Jean, leaning upon her cane, in her new "blacks," to which she had added another fold of crape for each new death, was standing in the middle of the room, looking at them. Matilda had not budged from her sofa. She had nodded, and said, "How d'ye do? Give the lady a chair, Fleming," without further disturbing herself; and it was these words that Aunt Jean was slowly repeating when Marjory went in.

“Give the leddy a chair, Fleming!” she said; “that’s a kind and a pleasant welcome for one that was born in the house, and knows everything and every person in it. Perhaps, Fleming, as, no doubt, you’re informed on the subject, you will let me know who this young lady may be?”

“It’s Mrs. Chairles, mem,” said Fleming, solemn as a judge.

“Ah! poor thing; I understand,” said Miss Jean; “brought up in India! that explains much. But, Mistress Chairles, if you’ll allow your husband’s grand-aunt to say it, young women in this country get up off their seats when they’re visited by any person worthy of respect. I am twice your age, and I’m Thomas Heriot, your father-in-law’s, aunt.”

“Tell her how delicate I am; I am not allowed to talk much,” said Mrs. Charles, addressing her sister. “And I am in great trouble,” she continued in her own person; “and very much tried, and too unwell to do anything. Pray take a seat. Marjory will

be here directly. I suppose she is the person you want?"

"I came to see an afflicted family," said Miss Jean, solemnly. "Most people think it necessary to say they're sorry when there's been death in a family. Oh! you are here, Marjory! Mistress Charles tells me it's you I want. I wanted the whole family—that was my intention; but if you're all as easy in your mind, and stand as little in need of comfort as she does, I'll have my coming for my going, and I might have stayed at home."

"I am very glad to see you, Aunt Jean," said Marjory; and struck with the unchangeable look of the old face, which altered not, whatever altered, a sudden *accès* of tears came to her. "It seems to be years ago," she said, faltering; "but you never change."

"No, I never change," said the old woman, with a tremble in her voice. The words very nearly upset her composure, steady as she was in the calm of her old age; for Aunt Jean, too, had human feelings—and a still older

generation, further off than the father of this house, who had been so lately carried out of it, sprang out of all the shadows as Marjory spoke, and came and stood about the old, old human creature who had once been young.

“I’ll sit down,” she added, hastily. “I’m old and no strong, though I never change. That was a hard word to say. I mind changes enough in myself, more than you have ever known; from young to old, Marjory Hay-Heriot; from a bonnie young thing, as bonnie as you are at your best, to an old witch like what you see me. I hope that’s change enough; but you think I should change away out of the world, and let younger folk take my place and bide? Well, maybe so do I; but one way or another, it’s not in our hands.”

“I did not mean anything unkind, Aunt Jean.”

“Well, you might have meant that, and no harm done,” said the old woman; “and you may cry, it’s natural; but you need not forget your manners. Introduce these young leddies that do not know me. The one on the sofa is

Mistress Chairles. Ay, I know that; but she does not know me."

"Oh, yes; indeed I do, thanks," said Matilda. "Excuse my getting up. I knew whenever you came in, that you must be poor Charlie's old aunt."

"That shows how civil he must have been in his descriptions, and what it is to be well-bred," said Miss Jean.

"And this," said Marjory, hastily interrupting her, to stop some farther interchange of courtesies, "is Miss Basset, Mrs. Charles's sister."

Verna came forward with a curtsy of deep deference.

"I hope you will forgive my sister," she said; "she is very much fatigued with her journey, and all she has had to bear since. It is not very long, not three months, since her baby was born; and with all her trials—"

Miss Jean looked somewhat contemptuously towards the sofa, and then she said, abruptly,

“Where’s your Uncle Charles? He’s a born haverel, but he’s a man, and, therefore, trusted. Send for him, that I may hear his mind. I’ve not come this long way for nothing, and I want to know what you are all going to do.”

Marjory rang the bell. She did not even understand the look with which Mrs. Charles from the sofa watched her. When she was about to give her orders, however, Matilda interrupted her.

“You can give Mr. Heriot my compliments,” she said, addressing Fleming, “and say that his aunt is here, and that I wish him to come, please. I beg your pardon, Marjory; I prefer to give him all the orders myself. If I don’t, he never will get used to me; and Charlie used to say I was always too humble, letting everybody get the better of me. I should not have said Mr. Heriot, though. Fancy, Verna! it is little Tommy that is Mr. Heriot, and his old uncle is only Mr. Charles. What fun it is!”

Miss Jean looked on with keen eyes. If Marjory had shown any signs of discomfiture,

probably she would have enjoyed it; for she too, in her antediluvian experience, she who had once been the Laird of Pitcomlie's daughter, and dethroned by a sister-in-law, could recall some scenes very similar, which had driven her nearly frantic with rage. But Marjory was still so dull and dead, that this incident scarcely affected her. A slight smile came upon her face when Matilda stopped her, and she drew a chair beside her visitor without making any remark. Miss Jean, however, made a great many remarks. Her keen eyes travelled about the room, from one corner to another, noticing everything in the new arrangements which had already crept in; the displacing of a chair, the sofa drawn forward. She was not very familiar with the Pitcomlie drawing-room, and yet she recognised the changes with her keen eyes.

“That used to be your favourite place?” she said, pointing to the spot where Mrs. Charles's sofa had replaced Marjory's chair.

“Yes, I liked the window,” said Marjory, making the best of it.

“And it was there you used to have your work?”

“Yes, Aunt Jean—but—”

“And that’s the bow-window Thomas Heriot was so foolish as to make, poor shortsighted haverel of a man, for his bonnie May?”

“Oh, Aunty, yes! I have had the good of it so long—but if I had never enjoyed it at all,” cried Marjory with tears, “I should be glad to think he had done it—for me!”

“Ay, ay,” said the old woman, “that’s how the world goes. For his bonnie May! I tell ye there were things once done like that for a bonnie Jean—that has not been bonnie this many, many a day—and the strangers get the good of them. That’s how the world goes.”

“What are they talking about?” said Matilda to Verna. “What an old witch she looks! I know she means to be disagreeable. But don’t you think I shall give in, not for all the Heriots in the world. I am not going to be interfered with by sisters, or aunts, or any other kind of relations. I mean to be mistress in my own house.”

“And of course you will do it your own silly way,” said Verna. “When you have the whole house by the ears, don’t ask me to come in and help you, that is all. I never saw anyone so hard-hearted, so silly, so cruel—”

“Oh, I like that,” said Matilda, with a fool’s invincible barbarity. “If I were as cruel as you call me, how long would it be before I sent you back?”

Mr. Charles came into the room at this moment, moody and absent, still full of his own thoughts. His chimney-corner was covered with an old red Indian shawl. Matilda had tried that too this morning, and found it a comfortable seat, though rather too warm for the season. “In Winter it will be charming,” she had said, and left her shawl, her air-cushion, and her footstool, by way of showing her appropriation of the place. Somehow that flag of the invader caught Mr. Charles’s eye even when he drew his chair into the middle of the room, and greeted Aunt Jean with the seriousness which was appropriate to a visit of condolence. “You see us in sad

circumstances, very sad circumstances." he said.

"Some of you bear up wonderfully considering all things," said Miss Jean, "though perhaps not this girrl here, who is a perfect shadow. A funeral visit's a dreary thing, Chairlie Heriot, and I did not come just to condole. I had a good enough guess how things would be, having gone through it myself; and I came to ask what were your plans, and what was to be done with Marjory? I suppose she does not mean to stay here."

"Say something, Matty," whispered Verna, shaking her sister, "for your own sake don't be quite a wretch—say something! Ask her to stay."

"We have come to no resolution," said Mr. Charles blankly. He could not look round to make an appeal to the new mistress of the house, but he raised his voice in his weakness that she might hear him. "We have come to no resolution. I'm very fond of my old tower, and so is Marjory of her father's house."

"Say something, Matty, for heaven's sake,"

again said Verna behind backs. "It is a large house—ask them to stay."

"I am sure," said Matilda after a pause, "I don't wish anyone to hurry. If Marjory will promise not to interfere with the servants, or the things—or give orders, or ring the bell for Fleming when she pleases—she may stay if she likes. Only I know dear Charlie would have wished me to be mistress in my own house."

Mr. Charles had sprung nervously to his feet. "Not another day!" he said hastily; but then sat down again with that blank irresolute air. Where was he to take her? and then the responsibility, and his old tower that he loved!

"You're a very considerate young woman," said Miss Jean grimly, with a fierce little chuckling laugh. "You'll be much respectit in the county, and much thought of by the Heriots' auld friends. That I'll assure you of—indeed I'll see to it myself."

"Oh, thanks," said Matilda, with a certain alarm, for it was evident even to her obtuse understanding that more was meant than met the ear.

“I’ll see to that myself,” the old woman repeated with a chuckle. “And in the meantime, Marjory, go you and get your things, and bring the bairn, and come away home with me. Coullie High Street is no amiss for a born and bred Heriot; everybody in Fife knows you, and what you are, and how you come there, which is more than can be said for everybody. Come away, my bonny woman; and as for you, Charlie Heriot, you can do what you please; stay on till they turn you out, or till you’ve gathered up all your playthings, your pictures and your papers, and the whole paraphernalia. But in the meantime I’ll no see my flesh and blood putting up with the slights of a strange woman. Marjory and the bairn shall come with me.”

Mr. Charles was wounded in his tenderest feelings, but still he saw a certain consolation and relief in this suddenly propounded plan, which would save him from so many difficulties.

“I would not say but it was the best thing that could be done,” he said, slowly. “Any-

how, May, my dear, it would leave us time to think."

"I had thought of it," said Marjory. "I knew Aunt Jean would take us in. It is the best refuge for us. I shall be glad to go away, and yet not to go away. If you think we will not be a trouble to you—"

"Na, na; no trouble, no trouble. In a whilie," said the old woman, with moisture in her keen eyes, "it will all be yours, my old house and my pickle siller. It's a great thing to have natural heirs. You're too natural, Marjory, too natural. You've smiled the lads away from you with scornings and civil speeches, as I did myself. You'll be Miss Heriot, like me. It's suited me well enough, but yet I'm wae to see another begin. For life's long, and sometimes it's weary and dreary. There's more trouble the other way, but even trouble is a divert, and keeps you from that weary think-thinking, and aill about yourself."

"But you've no warrant, Aunt Jean—no warrant," said Mr. Charles, with great impa-

tience, "for saying that Marjory will be an old maid, like you."

"An old maid!" said Miss Jean, hastily; "she's an old maid already; she's five-and-twenty; that's the age that makes an old maid—and not five-and-seventy, which is my amiable time of life. But I'm no one to give nicknames, or I would be sore tempted to say that you were an old maid yourself, Charlie Heriot, with all your pernickety ways. You were never a lad of mettle, even in your best days; but you'll get no rest for your long legs here, ye may take my word for it. In the meantime, ye can give me your arm to the door, where I'll wait for Marjory. Good morning to ye, leddies; you're very civil and polite to the family, and I'll not fail to make it known."

"Oh, what an old witch!" said Matilda, as Miss Jean marched out with her cane tapping more briskly than usual upon the floor. "I suppose she wanted to come too, and live upon Tommy's money, like all the rest; but he has got a mother to take care of him, the precious darling!"

“Oh, Matty, for heaven’s sake—don’t be such a fool!”

“You’re frightened of the witch,” cried Matilda, with a laugh; “as if she could do us either good or harm.”

“No good, you may be sure!” said Verna, walking to the window with disturbed looks. Miss Jean’s old carriage stood at some little distance from the door, and she herself walked up and down in front of the house with her cane, leaning on Mr. Charles’s arm. Fleming stood on the steps, taking his part in the conversation. “A bonnie-like mistress for the old house!” she was saying, with scorn in her keen black eyes.

“Ye may say that, Miss Jean!” said old Fleming, shaking his head.

Verna did not understand what was the meaning of so strange an expression. “Bonnie” sounded like admiration, and Matilda certainly was pretty; but there was little admiration in the tone. Her watch was interrupted by the entrance of Marjory to take leave. Milly was clinging by her sister’s side as usual, holding out

her little hand with a certain defiance ; and even Matilda faltered out a half-apology, and raised herself from her sofa to say good-bye.

“ I hope it isn't for what I said about the servants, Marjory. Of course, I didn't mean to vex you ; but you know yourself, unless a change is made at once, it is never made ; and dear Charlie was so set upon it that I should be mistress of my own house.”

“ You are quite right, and I am not vexed ;” said Marjory, with a smile ; and it was thus hurriedly, without any more leave-taking, before the weeping maids had time to gather from all the corners, to take leave of her, that she left, as she thought for ever, her father's house.

CHAPTER VII.

“Go away, go away, you taupies!” said Fleming; “go away to your wark; what’s the use o’ a when women, girnin’ and greetin’ about the place? It’s a’ I can to do to keep things gaun, saftly and steadily, for the credit of the house, so long as my time lasts—without distraction from you.”

“Whar’s Miss Marjory?” said the housemaid. “If you think it’s you we’re wanting you’re far mistaken. Maister Fleming, it was ill done of you to let her go away, and never to say a word. Eh, what changes in this house since I came here! I’ve been here ten year come the term—”

“And me mair than that!” said Beenie, who

was kitchenmaid under Mrs. Simpson, and nearly as good a cook as her superior. "I mind her when she was a bit lassie, and me no much mair myself. If any have reason to be down-hearted about the family it's me, that am the longest here, except Mr. Fleming. Eh! but I'm wae no' to have seen the last of her—as I've seen the last o' a' the rest."

"For guidsake, woman, dinna speak as if Miss Marjory was dead like the rest!" cried another. They all stood round the door, gazing out after the rumbling old carriage as it jolted along the drive. Mr. Charles had turned from the door, and was visible in the distance, making towards the side entrance into his beloved refuge. Marjory's maid set up a dismal cry at the sight of the departing vehicle. "Oh, my young leddy! my bonny young leddy!" she cried. "I'm no so auld as some of you, but that's no my fault; and I've seen mair of Miss Marjory than the whole of you put together. Eh! will I never see her mair? will she never come back to this dreary house? We may get as good places, but there will never be the like of her in Pitcomlie again."

“Haud you your tongue, my woman!” said Fleming, patting her on the shoulder. “If Miss Marjory had thought as much of you as you do of her, she would have taken you with her. She’s no that ill left but what she can keep her maid like any other leddy. Haud a’ your tongues—”

“What’s a’ this, Sirrs?” said Mrs. Simpson, suddenly appearing on the field. “Miss Marjory? If Miss Marjory was gane twenty times o’er, is that a reason for neglecting the wark? Wark maun be done, whoever goes or stays. Death itself makes little difference. Mr. Fleming, it’s no what I expected of you, to encourage those taupies in their idleness. Go away to your wark, go away every one of you. I’ll speak to Miss Marjory—Lord bless us! I’ll never mind that Miss Marjory’s nae langer the mistress here. Now thae woman are gane, I’m free to say that it makes a great difference to the place, Mr. Fleming. I’ve nothing to say against English leddies; there are ower many of them in the country-side for the like of us to find fault; but Mistress Chairles is no to my taste—she’s no to my

taste. I've learnt what it was to have leddies over me that were grand at understanding, and I canna' put up with a whippersnapper like that."

Fleming nodded his head in assent; he nodded so often that one of the young maid-servants, lurking at a distance, had nearly betrayed herself by laughter; but there was no merriment in his mind. "You're in the right of it there!" was all he said.

"It may be rather early to make up your mind what to do," said Mrs. Simpson; "and especially me as I have a kind of dependence upon Mr. Charles, that was the one, ye maybe ken that brought me here—"

"I'm leaving at the term," said Fleming shortly.

"At the term?"

"Just that! I have sixpence here and sixpence there, laid out to advantage. A man canna hear so much gude solid conversation as I've heard at Pitcomlie table, without having his wits shairpened. I'm no wanting to set up myself as mair clever than ordinary; but it's weel invested, weel invested. It would be a sin against my

many mercies if I did not acknowledge as much."

"No doubt, no doubt!" said Mrs. Simpson, dazzled by this intimation, and respectfully interested, as most people are in confidences respecting money; "you're so weel kent for a sensible man, that I can easy believe that."

"Yes, it's weel invested," said Fleming. "I'm no one to brag, but I've had opportunities mair than most men can boast of, and I hope I've profited. A nice quiet business now, either in the public line, or a general merchant's, might be very suitable to a man like me—that has studied mankind a wee, and knows the world; but there's mair than a man wanted for setting up—there's the wife."

"Oh, ay, nae doubt ye'll be thinking of a wife!" said Mrs. Simpson, veiling under a smile of rustic raillery the palpitation of her matronly bosom at this address. There is something in the aspect of a man who has intentions, which betrays itself at once to the accustomed eye. Mrs. Simpson recognized it by instinct, and she made violent efforts to regain the utter unconsciousness which is the wisest

attitude to be maintained in such a case by every woman who respects herself. "You'll no be long a wanter when you have sic a story to tell," she said; "and nae doot ye have some bonnie lass in your eye."

"Weel!" said Fleming, with that indescribable air of subdued yet triumphant vanity which no woman ever mistakes, "maybe no just a lass; nor maybe what you would call bonnie to them that looks but skin-deep; but a real, honest, decent woman that knows the world—and that's better. I'm no just to call young nor bonnie mysel'; and if I maun speak the truth, as, is aye best, it's just you, my woman—nobody but you."

"Me! the man's gane gyte!" said Mrs. Simpson, with admirable surprise. She took him in from head to foot with one glance of her eye, and put him into a mental balance, and weighed him in the course of one moment. He was not young—nor yet bonnie; certainly not bonnie she allowed to herself; but yet there was something to be said on his side of the question.

"Na, no me," said the old butler. "I'm but showing my sense. There's many a braw lad

of my years, with guid prospects, excellent prospects, and nae incumbrances, that would please his e'e with some bit gilflirt o' twenty, raither than satisfy his mind as I'm doing. Therefore, Betty Simpson, my woman, if you've naething to say against it, there's my hand, I'll ne'er beguile ye. As for the bairns, as there's but two, and them grown up, I'll look over the bairns."

"Lord bless the man, his head's clean turned," cried Mrs. Simpson. "Look over the bairns! They're nae sin that I should be excused for them. Na, na. Naebody that's no proud to have them—a callant that's a credit to a' belonging to him, and as trig a lass of sixteen as ever steppit, and extraordinary clever with her hands for her age—"

"I tell you I'll look over them," said Fleming. "I've nae incumbrances mysel; but since they're there, and canna be made away wi', I'll put up with them, my woman. Ye may take me or ye may leave me. I'm no forcing ye one way or the other; but here I am, no an ill man, though I say it that shouldna, and you'll be a

great fuil if ye dinna close the bargain. That's a' I've got to say."

"Ye're but an auld haverel yourself to talk any such nonsense," said the housekeeper, beginning to melt. "But if I could be sure ye meant a' ye say——"

"A', and mair, my deary," said Fleming, advancing with antiquated gallantry. "But it's no the time nor the season," he continued, making a pause. "I'll gi'e ye what proof ye like at a mair convenient moment. A', and mair."

"If ye werena such an auld whillie-wha—" said the housekeeper; but she finally withdrew, with a promise to turn it over in her mind. Fleming was not tortured by any serious anxiety. He nodded his head when he was left by himself with a satisfied smile. "That's done!" he said to himself decisively, and prepared to carry in the tray for the afternoon tea, with sentiments of genial placidity and benevolence. These amiable feelings, however, were doomed to be soon ruffled.

"Bring it here," said Matilda, impetuously;

“do you think I am going to get up off my chair to go to the other end of the room? Wheel that table up to the sofa and place it here.”

“The table will have to go back again, I’m thinking, Mistress Chairles, when you’re done,” said Fleming. “It’s one that belongs to auld Mr. Charles Heriot, no to the house.”

“Hold your tongue, Sir; I was not consulting you,” cried Matilda. “I never heard a servant venture to talk so. You will please to recollect, that sort of thing might do with Miss Heriot, but it will not do with me. She might put up with it, but I shan’t. If you cannot be quiet and respectful, you had better make up your mind to go at once.”

“I’ll do that, Mistress Chairles,” said Fleming. “You and me will never ’gree, I see weel. I’ve settled to leave at the term; but if it’s mair agreeable to you to gie me board wages and so forth——”

“What do you mean by the term, as you call it?” said Matilda, beginning to quake.

“It’s an awful pity when leddies do not

understand the language o' the country they're living in," said Fleming, drily. "The term is Whitsunday, Mistress Charles, if you ken that. If no, I'll bring ye the date when I've lookit it up in the Almanack."

"Leave the room, Sir, and go as soon as possible," cried Matilda, in wrath. It cannot be denied that the old butler of Pitcomlie was trying as a servant to unaccustomed nerves and tempers. He drew the table she had indicated, which was a heavy one, inlaid with marble, one of Mr. Charles's curiosities, with much trouble to the side of the sofa, and arranged the tray very deliberately upon it. Then he walked slowly to the fire and made it up, and for five minutes kept pottering about the room, putting invisible trifles in order, and wearing Matilda's temper to a fierce and fine edge. "Oh, for heaven's sake, go away!" she cried, "and leave the house, you horrid impertinent—— Miss Marjory might put up with you, but I shan't. Send Mr. Charles Heriot to me directly. Go and call him directly, do you hear, Sir? Will you go, or must I go myself?" cried the impatient young woman,

jumping up from her sofa. "Ring the bell, Verna, ring the bell instantly! send for the old gentleman. I suppose there are other servants in the house?"

"Oh, ay, Mrs. Charles, plenty of servants," said Fleming, making his exit in a leisurely way, while the bell pealed through the house, rousing all the maids.

"She's fainted or something," cried Mrs. Simpson. "She's just the kind o' person to faint. Run you, Jenny, and get the English maid; and some of ye flee with cauld water—and I'll burn some feathers and come after ye myself."

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" said Mr. Charles, stumbling through the women, who had crowded towards the drawing-room door, in the pleasureable excitement of such an occurrence.

"It's Mrs. Charles that's fainted. It's the young leddy," they all murmured in tones of interest. Matilda, however, herself met him, furious, on the threshold.

"Am I to have nothing but impudence?" she

cried, "and people laughing at me, and—and paying no attention to whatever I say? Is this my house or is it not? I will not put up with it. I will pack them all out of the house one after another. I will give them no characters; I will—— Oh, you are all a set of barbarians!" cried Matilda, bursting into tears. "Oh, if poor dear Charlie had been here, he would never, never have allowed me to be used like this. And you—do you call yourself a gentleman, and let them all insult me? Or perhaps you told them to do it, because it is me, and not your niece that you are so fond of. Oh, Verna, come and help me! Oh, isn't there anybody? No man that is a gentleman would stand and gape, and see me treated so!"

Mr. Charles did gape, there is no doubt. He was filled with the profoundest consternation. In all his experience, such a thing had never happened before. He did not understand the kind of creature thus sobbing, raging, insulting everybody around her. He made a gulp to swallow down his amazement, and waved his hand to the assembled servants.

“Go away, go away,” he said. “Whisht—never mind—go away like good creatures, like kind creatures. You see it’s a mistake, and you’re not wanted. Mrs. Simpson, my good woman, there’s no need for your feathers and your salts. Take them all away. There’s nothing wanted—nothing wanted,” Mr. Charles repeated, closing the door upon the assistants.

It was rather terrible to confront the heroine of the scene himself; but he had all a Scotchman’s terror of “exposure,” and shame of excitement, and loud voices. At this moment, too, when the family was in such trouble! Mr. Charles looked pale and limp as he closed the door behind him, and faced, trembling, the clamouring newcomer, who made such claims upon him. He kept his eye upon her, as he might have done upon some unknown wild animal. And he cast a pitiful glance at Verna, who sat dumb in his own particular corner—a fact which he did not omit to note—working, as Mr. Charles described it afterwards, “at some ridiculous woman’s work or other, and paying no more attention than if it was not her concern.”

“Whisht, whisht!” said Mr. Charles; “don’t cry! It cannot be so bad as you think. If anybody has done anything to disturb you, of course we’ll put it all right—we’ll put it all right; don’t cry. Tell me what’s happened, and no doubt we’ll be able to put it all right.”

“Oh! how can you ask me what’s happened—everything’s happened!” cried Matilda. “There is not a servant in the house that does not insult us. They say disagreeable things to Elvin; they hate the poor Ayah, though I don’t mind that so much, for I want an opportunity to send her away. I am sure they pinch poor Tommy when they have a chance, for the child’s arms are black and blue. And as for me!” cried Matilda, rising into renewed excitement; “it’s all because they think we’re interlopers, and because the other Heriots, the old family, have gone and twisted their minds. They think no more of me than if I was the dust below the feet of that Marjory. Marjory, indeed! an old maid, as that old witch said, that never had any right to

be mistress—that was never anything but the old gentleman's daughter—”

“Hem—ahem!” Mr. Charles made a great sound of coughing; it was the only thing he could do to drown all this, and to keep himself from getting angry. (“I was very near getting into a passion,” he said afterwards; “I was very near speaking sharp, as I would have been sorry to have spoken.”) To prevent this, he coughed so much that Matilda's voice was drowned, and his own angry feelings cooled down.

“You will excuse my cough. I have got a cold, it appears,” he said, pleased with his own skill in having devised this expedient; and then, when a momentary pause had been obtained, he added, “We'll not discuss Marjory, if you please. The servants here have been good kind of creatures; faithful and honest, so far as I've seen. You must excuse them if they feel the change. Some of them have been long here, and are used to—to the old family, as you say. But if there's been any real insult, any disrespect, no doubt you have a right to my

services ; I cannot think, however, that any one in this house has been guilty of that. Miss Bassett—”

“ Oh, don't ask anything of me,” said Verna, turning her back. “ She chooses to manage her own affairs herself. I don't mean to interfere.”

“ Oh ! you wicked, cruel girl !” cried Matilda, throwing herself, sobbing, on the sofa. “ Oh ! why was I spared from the voyage, or from my confinement—the one coming so close on the other ? Why was I made to live after my poor Charlie—my Charlie, that never would let any one worry me ? If he were here, none of you would dare—you would all be trying which could be kindest—you would, every one ! Oh ! what shall I ever do in this hard-hearted place ? Why didn't you take me and leave me with Charlie, and be done with it, rather than kill me an inch at a time, as you are doing now ?”

Mr. Charles walked about the room in confusion and dismay, and heard a great deal more of this, before he could get free to inquire into

the real causes of the fray. When he escaped at last, the confusion of his mind was such that he stepped into the middle of Fleming's tray full of glasses for dinner, and broke several before he could pull himself up. When the further perturbation and excitement consequent upon this crash had been dispelled, and the pieces of broken glass carefully picked up and disposed of, Mr. Charles, still tremulous, swallowed a glass of sherry, and opened his mind to the old retainer of the house.

"Fleming," he said, "we've had a great and blessed dispensation in our ladies, in this house. They've been free of the follies of their kind in a way that's quite extraordinary to think of. But we must not expect that we're always to be so fortunate, or that Providence has just singled us out, you know, for special favour. We must try and put up with what's sent, and do our duty to the best of our ability—"

"'Deed, Mr. Charles," said Fleming, "I have nae doubt it's real important to you to be able to take that comfort to yoursel', being one of

the family, and in a manner bound to do your best; but as for me, I'm but a servant. I've served my forty year, which is long enough to gi'e me the best of characters in ony place; and I've saved a pickle siller, and invested it—by your advice, Sir, and that of ithers—in a very advantageous manner; and if I'm ever to mairry a wife, and hae a fireside of my ain, I 'have nae time to lose. I'm no saying but what you'll make a great hand o't, and carry the leddies through and break them in; but for me at my age to stand yon bit creature's temper and her ignorance, and haud my tongue and clip my words to please her—by George! it's what I'll no do! And when I'm driven to sweer, Mr. Chairles—”

“And, by George! I'll not do it either!” said Mr. Charles, smiting his lean thigh. He was so roused up and stimulated by this valiant resolution, that he took another glass of sherry on the spot, a thing he had not been known to do for years. “I wish ye joy of the wife, &c.,” he said. “I'll not follow your example in that; but why I should make myself miser-

able and ridiculous, for an idiot of a strange woman, at my time of life! By George! I'll not do it, any more than you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MARJORY, as may be supposed, heard nothing of the tragi-comic commotion which she had left behind her. Her drive in the old carriage, the sight of many familiar things and places for the first time, after so much had passed which had separated her from her old world, roused her half painfully, half pleasantly. Every corner of the peaceful road, every cottage on the way, made its separate stab at her; so many remembrances which had fallen dormant in her mind, remembrances of "the boys," which from sheer familiarity and easiness of recollection had fallen out of recollection, started up in new life before her. She seemed to hear the shouts

of their school time, and to see them, not men but lads, in their innocence and foolishness, about every turning. This wounded her sore, and yet gave her a sort of happiness. It was not like the drear blank of disappearance, the superseding of them, and calm passing on of the unconcerned world, which had, stupefied her mind. Thus the change did her good as people say; and perhaps the sight of Miss Jean did her good, and the harsh yet true kindness which spoke so despotically and acted so gently. But when she was safely housed in the High Street, a great reaction set in. So long as daylight lasted, Marjory turned her wistful eyes along the line of the coast towards the east, where the mansion house of Pitcomlie stood out on its headland, with something of the feelings which moved her on her drive. She sat there and recalled stories of her youth, feats which "the boys" had done, hairbreadth escapes, old dead jokes of the past, pitifullest of recollections. All these came up and buzzed about her. She smiled and wondered to find herself amused by memories which ought, she felt, to have

been anything but amusing. These realizations of the past were sharp and poignant in the pain of their sorrow; but at the same time they were sweet.

It was only when night fell, when the silence of the small house fell round her, when the few people about were all asleep, and the street, upon which her room looked out, was quiet as the grave, that the pleasure of these recollections failed. She got chilled in the mournful silence. It was a still night, and the sound from the sea came very softly upon her ear, like a cadence measured and gentle. All was very still in Miss Jean's maiden habitation. The two maids slept down stairs at a distance from the other rooms. They went to bed at ten o'clock, as indeed did the little town with very few exceptions. Looking out from her window, as Marjory did by habit, being used to look out every night upon the sea, she saw opposite to her, in place of the intermittent gleam of the lighthouse to which she was accustomed, a steady glimmer in young Hepburn's window, which was opposite. That was the only sign of fellowship in all

the shadowy silent little town, where there was a sense of the presence of others without any sign of friendliness from them. This light roused in Marjory a vague uneasiness in the midst of so many other heavy thoughts. What was it that it recalled to her? Some other kind of light, some other sympathy. She dropped the blind and went in, and sat down wearily. A stifling sense of loss and dreary vacancy came upon her.

All her life long Pitcomlie and its interests had been her first thought. She had become the mistress of the house at a very early age, when she was little more than a child; and through all her subsequent life this care and occupation was all to her that a man's purpose is to him, filling her mind and mixing itself with all her expectations. Marjory had never loved any man with that strong and personal affection which overcomes all hindrances; but she had been loved and wooed, and no doubt, but for this, might have married one of her suitors or another. She had not, however, found herself able—she had not “had time” to let such an idea

seize hold upon her mind. It had seemed so impossible that Pitcomlie, her father, her uncle, her baby-sister, and in the earlier period of her incumbency, "the boys," could do without her. It was impossible, quite impossible, she had said, when any dawn of inclination seemed rising within her. Thus she set herself and her own life aside as a secondary thing, and gave herself up to duties which an illness or an accident might terminate at any moment, without help or warning, leaving her stranded high and dry upon the shore. Women are trained to make such sacrifices, and make them daily, with the reward of being smiled at as old maids a little later, by their juniors who have known no such bond of duty. Marjory was far beyond the possibility of feeling such a penalty. She was thinking nothing of the consequences, nor of what her future life should be. What she felt was that the use of her was over, that her duties were finally done, that Pitcomlie wanted her no more, nor anyone, nor any place; her work in the world seemed accomplished. She had no longer anything to

do for her family whom she had served with loyal devotion for so long. She had been their servant, and yet in a certain sense their mistress; but the duties of both offices were over. She was cast adrift; look where she might, she saw in the blank world before her nothing more to be done, which in any way resembled the office she had filled all her life. The only charge remaining to her was Milly; but after all to superintend the education of a child is very different from the many and various occupations which belong to the guidance of a family, the regulation of all domestic affairs, the interests moral and material with which she had been accustomed to deal.

A general deprived of his command, a sailor with his ship taken from him, could not have been more at a loss than this young woman, suddenly deprived of the occupations which had given character and meaning to all her past existence. She sat down drearily in Miss Jean's best room, amid all the dark old furniture, leaning her elbows upon an old escritoire which had belonged to her great-grandfather, and fixing

her eyes unaware upon a portrait of that great-grandfather's mother. All around her was old, shadowy, still. It seemed to her that she herself had glided into the midst of those shadows to take a permanent place among them. The long silent procession of ancestors and ancestresses seemed to take possession of her, to draw her, a silent follower into their silent train. The very house and room seemed to exercise a certain fascination over her. They seemed to put their veto upon all change, novelty, movement of every kind. The High Street of Comlie, grass-grown and silent, the monotonous continued cadence of the sea, the little round of occupations which were no occupations, the position of spectator, sometimes bitterly, always disapprovingly critical of everything that went on at the house she had once ruled—was this all that remained for Marjory Hay-Heriot at twenty-five, as it was all that had fallen to the lot of Jean Hay-Heriot, and of many a proud silent gentlewoman besides, who had lived and died so, and scorned to complain?

Perhaps a milder and meeker woman would have seen a point of duty still remaining, which Marjory did not recognise. I am aware that, especially in books, there are sisters who would have devoted themselves to the self-denying task of watching over the new household at Pitcomlie, guiding the young widow in the way in which she should go, and helping to train up a new and worthy representative of the family in the person of little Tommy, the future Laird. This, however, was an aspect of the matter which did not occur to Marjory. The fact that these new people were Charlie's wife and connections, I am afraid, exercised a repelling rather than attractive effect upon her. Their existence seemed almost a wrong to Charlie. Marjory made haste to separate his memory, poor fellow, from that of the strangers who had come in by accident, as it were, and snatched the home of her fathers out of her hands. She was too proud to say a word of complaint, and too sensible not to recognize fully the right of the new-comers. Nay, she was even impartial enough to compel herself to understand how

Matilda's impatience to take possession of her new rights might be justified. But the reason often recognizes what the heart does not admit; and to range herself on the side of Mrs. Charles was utterly impossible to Charlie's sister. The best thing she could now do was to forget Pitcomlie altogether, she said to herself. The worst thing, and unfortunately the most likely, was that she should become, like Miss Jean, the critic of Pitcomlie, half-consciously on the outlook for its follies, and judging it severely, perceiving all its mistakes, and scarcely sorry for them. Marjory, who was no model of womankind, felt within herself all the capability for doing this. She felt that it was possible to her, and shrank with dismay from the thoughts.

Thus her heart was sick with more than grief —with the sense as of a heavy curtain which had fallen over her life, an ending put to all that was worthy of being called life in it. Her existence had stopped, but she continued. How many of us have felt this! and what poor expedients some are put to, to invent for them-

selves such excuses for living as may cheat the vacancy into some reasonable semblance! This cannot happen, fortunately, at twenty-five; but Marjory felt, as was natural, that twenty-five was a great age, and that she had outlived all the new openings, all the possibilities of youthful existence. Miss Hay-Heriot, of the High Street of Comlie, like her great-aunt Jean, and many great-aunts before that, with all the use died out of her, and nothing to do but live. If she had been brought up to it, Marjory thought to herself, she would have minded less; but what a strange and dismal contrast from the life she had been brought up to—the busy existence full of care which she had lived only a fortnight since, appealed to on every side, found fault with, looked up to, with so many disagreeable offices thrust upon her, and work which she would gladly have got rid of! Now she had got rid of all her work at a stroke, and the cares seemed happiness to her in comparison with the blank which their absence left.

When her thoughts came to this point, however, they changed with a sudden start and

spring. For there was something she had to do which no one now would dream of interfering with. It was late by this time, the middle of the night in Comlie, where everybody was up by six o'clock, and Marjory was half afraid to move about the old room, where every board creaked under her foot. But she opened her box, which was near her, and took from it poor Tom's little desk, in which she had found his bills and his useless treasures. From thence she took out the packet which she had made up so carefully with the list and calculations which had given her so much trouble, and which it had grieved her so much to think of explaining to her father. Her father had got off without hearing of them, without any posthumous stab from his dead son. The stab had gone into Marjory's breast to have the edge blunted, and there it remained. Surely, she thought, with some natural tears, some good angel had watched over him, to give him an easy dismissal out of this hard world. He had never known that Tom had deceived him; he had never known that Charlie had died. But some one must always pay the penalty for such ex-

emptions. Marjory took out her own calculations in the middle of the night, in the stillness, among all the shadows, and looked at the list ruefully enough. There was nobody now but herself to do it. Tom's memory was nothing to the new possessors of Pitcomlie, to no one, indeed, except herself, and perhaps one other, one helpless creature, who was breaking her heart it might be, somewhere, with no right to mourn, no power to vindicate. It gave Marjory, however, a little shock to feel the vulgar aspect of this sole thing which it remained to her to do for the family. It put Isabell out of her mind, so potent is the force of a bit of harsh reality over all gentler thoughts. To pay Tom's debts; that was what she had to do. She almost smiled by herself at the difference between her theoretical sense of high devotion to her own people, and the perfectly prosaic yet disagreeable form which that devotion must take. There was nothing lofty in it to swell her heart, or give her the elevating consciousness of a noble duty. It would only make her so much the poorer, abridge her capabilities, and perhaps procure for her

some irritating and troublesome discussions with the "man of business," who would not understand the necessity. But still it had to be done. Marjory swept all the papers impatiently back, when this fact made itself apparent to her. She was more sick than ever of everything about her. I don't know if a little annoyance at the absolute loss of so much money had anything to do with this feeling. I doubt very much whether it had, for money was little more than a symbol to Marjory. But a certain whimsical sense of an anti-climax—of a mean necessity following a grand intention—crossed her mind, disposing her half to laugh, and half to cry. Yes, it seemed dismal beyond measure to have come to an end of all her duties, to have nothing now to do for her family, whose prime minister she had been all her life; but to be roused from the painful depression of that thought to a consciousness of still having Tom's debts to pay! This sordid claim upon her, enveloped in a cloud of petty misery, of meanness, and unworthiness, and shifts, and falsehood, what otherwise was the mournfullest tragedy. Marjory pushed all the

papers away, almost throwing them into the escritoire in the movement of her impatience—and went to bed. The most sensible thing to do, no doubt; but meaning an amount of provoked temper, annoyance, vexation, and half ludicrous despair, which we will not attempt to describe.

During the next week, the half of Fife drove into the High Street to leave cards and pay visits of condolence. Such of them as were received in Miss Jean's old-fashioned drawing-room, were edified with an account of the shortcomings of Mrs. Chairles which made it difficult for these ladies to maintain the gravity proper to the occasion. But as for Marjory, she had the cards for her share; Miss Jean concluded that for a young woman who had lost her father and two brothers in so short a space of time, to be able to see any one, was an idea which was almost indecent—not to say criminal. Miss Jean was strong on this point, though her social code was lax on others; she spoke of her niece in subdued tones, as of an invalid; she was, “poor thing, as well as you could expect—not able for much, but resigned, and trying to bear her trouble like a Christian

woman." This was her old aunt's description of poor Marjory's half-stupefied, half-excited state, and of the superabundant life and energy which she felt within her. The old lady ordered her old carriage daily for a drive, which Marjory took with resignation, through the roads which were so familiar to her, where she seemed to know not only every turn, but every leaf upon every tree, and every blade of green corn which began to rise in the fields. After taking this exercise, which was her duty, Marjory had to resign herself to remain indoors; her longing for the beach, where the measured rising and falling of the sea was soothing to her, was considered by Miss Jean an illegitimate craving not to be encouraged.

"It's all imagination, all imagination. What good could the sea do ye? Sit at the back window, and ye'll hear it, sometimes more than ye wish," she said, with a shiver, thinking of the stormy wintry nights.

Sometimes, however, Marjory was permitted to stray round the churchyard, and renew the flowers which, with a weakness which Miss

Jean denounced, yet gave in to, she had placed upon the graves. She did this in the evening, when Comlie was beginning to close its windows, and few people saw her glide across the road in her black dress. On one of these occasions, however, Marjory found other people before her in the churchyard. Generally it was very quiet, the loneliest place, with its old sixteenth century monuments standing up around, guarding it from the approach of anything more novel. The two figures before her attracted little attention from her at first, till she perceived that the corner which attracted them was that which contained the Pitcomlie vault. They came back again and again to that spot, the man diverging now and then, the woman ever returning. When Marjory's attention was fully roused by this, it seemed to her that she recollected the woman's figure. She was of the middle size, of very ordinary dress and appearance, like a hundred others who might have been met in Comlie High Street; but there was something in her outline and the little gestures she made as she

called back her companion, which attracted Marjory's attention.

"Come back, John, come back; there is nothing I care for here but one thing," she said, leaning upon the very railing where Miss Heriot's own steps were bound. Marjory went up to her lightly and swiftly, and laid her hand on her shoulder. She turned round with a suppressed cry. It was the same young woman, round, ruddy, and commonplace, but with a serious look in her eyes which gave her a certain dignity, whom Marjory had spoken with at Pitcomlie the night before her father's funeral. The girl gave a visible start, changed colour, and called again, "Come back, John!" with an air of something like fright. Then she made an effort, and recovered command of herself. She made Marjory a slight curtsy, and confronted her steadily. "Were you wanting something with me, mem?" she said.

"I want to know what you have to do at my brother's grave?" said Marjory, breathless; "what you have to do with him? Won't you

tell me? There is nothing I would not give to know. Oh! tell me! I do not blame you. I mean no harm of any kind; but I want to know.”

“Wha said I had anything to do with either him or his grave?” said the young woman.

Her companion, attracted by the voices, drew near suddenly, and stood as if to stop further conversation between the two. The stranger gave one indifferent glance up at him, and then went on :

“I’ll no pretend I don’t know ye. You’re Miss Heriot, and I’m but a poor lass; but I’ve a right to walk in a place like this, if I like—to read the gravestones, if I like.”

“Oh, tell me!” said Marjory, too much excited to notice the air which her companion attempted to give to the discussion. “I mean no harm; tell me only who you are, and if you belong to Isabell.”

“What does the lady know about Isabell?” asked the man, interrupting suddenly.

“Nothing but her name,” said Marjory; “no-

thing but her name! and that she cared for my brother. I am not blaming her, or you. I mean no unkindness. I only want to know—to see her—to find out—”

“Miss Heriot,” said the young woman, “you’ll find out nothing with my will; you’re naething to us, and we’re naething that I ken of to you. If’ever there was anything to tell, you would hear, like others. But dinna interfere with us. Poor folk have rights as well as their betters. I will answer nae questions, and neither shall any that belongs to me.”

She turned away abruptly; but the man hesitated. He brought her back, plucking at her shawl.

“The lady means no harm,” he said. “She says so; and if there’s nothing to be ashamed of—”

“Oh, hold your tongue!” cried the girl, in a tone of exasperation. “It is me that has to judge, and I’ve made up my mind. Hold your peace, man! You would believe whatever was told you with a soft voice and a pleasant look. She stands up for her ain, and

we stand for ours. There's nae fellowship nor friendship between us. Good night to ye, men; we'll disturb you no longer. Man! cannot you hold your tongue?"

"If there was just reason—" he said, still hesitating.

The young woman clutched at his arm, and turned him away almost violently. Marjory watched them with a tumult of feelings which she scarcely understood. It seemed to her strange that she, too, could not turn to some one—tell some one what had happened. But there was no one to tell; and for that matter, nothing had happened. She watched them as they withdrew hastily, driven away by her presence. She stood with her hand upon the rail that encircled the family vault, with all the tablets inscribed with kindred names glimmering behind her. An imaginative observer might have supposed her to be guarding these graves from profanation. She stood as if she had driven off an attack upon them; but what attack was it? who were they? what did it mean? To these questions she could give no answer. She stood and leaned

upon the cold rail, and shed a few dreary tears on the marble beneath. There seemed to be nothing left to her but that marble, the iron railing, the chill graves that gave no response.

When she went in again, she had to close up her tears, her wondering pangs of curiosity, her dreary sense of loneliness, within herself. Was there no one in the world, no one left to whom ever again she could say all she was thinking; whom she could consult, who would help her even in such a hopeless inquiry as this? Not Miss Jean, certainly, who looked up with her keen eyes from the tea-table, and said something about wet feet, and needless exposure, and the need to be resigned; nor little Milly, who was ready to cry and kiss her sister, but could do no more to aid her; nor even Uncle Charles, who had arrived suddenly with news of his own to occupy him, and who was impatient if she did not give him her entire attention for his particular business. These were all who belonged to Marjory now, here or anywhere. Had she

dreamt somehow? had she seen a vision? had there been revealed to her in a break of the stormy clouds—some one else?

CHAPTER IX.

FANSHAWE left Pitcomlie with his head in a maze, affected as he had never been in his life, and had never supposed himself capable of being affected. He had been in love—as who has not, who has lived to be thirty?—but without feeling in the least as he felt now. In the feverish fits of that malady which he had experienced hitherto it was she, the heroine of the moment, that was foremost in his thoughts. He had been full of nothing but how to see her, how to have opportunities of talking to her, how to dance, or ride, or walk with her, according as the occasion favoured. In short, she had always belonged to some holiday version of life, and had been en-

shrined in a glittering framework of society, in which alone he knew her, and through which alone he could seek her presence. Half a dozen such loves at least, on a moderate computation, Fanshawe had experienced, and after having been made happy and miserable for a certain number of days or weeks, as it happened, society which brought her to him had swept her away again, and he had heard with resignation some time later that the temporary lady of his thoughts had become Mrs. or Lady Somebody Else. Sometimes a passing jar, of what is poetically called the heart-strings, hailed this information, and for a day or so he would be very sorry for himself as a poor devil who could never hope to marry; but there it had ended, and in a week after he had felt better, and decided that, on the whole, everything was for the best. This, however, was not at all the state of his feelings now. He did not know whether he was in love with Marjory Hay-Heriot. Sometimes he did not think he was; but one thing he was sure of, which was that he was very much out of love with himself. None of

those complacent self-compassionating complaints of the poor devil order occurred to him. His thoughts were of a kind much less easily managed. He was dissatisfied with himself and everything round him, with his means, his habits, his former life, his want of any actual existence worth speaking of, his complete unimportance to the world. He was young, strong, not badly endowed either in body or mind, with enough to live on, and no cares or trammels of any kind; and yet the fact was certain that, if he died to-morrow it would be no loss to any one; nobody would miss him; nothing would come to a stop. How many men would find themselves in the same position did they inquire into it? He had enough to live on, enough to keep a horse and a servant, to do whatever he pleased, to travel, to surround himself with such luxuries as he cared for, to get most things that he wanted. Except in that matter of a wife, which, to tell the truth, was a thing he had never very warmly wanted, there was nothing which he had denied himself. To be sure he was generally more

or less in debt, but never so much that he could not set his affairs right by an effort, if he had a strong enough motive for doing so. He had not thus the burden on his conscience that many other men have. He was a good-for-nothing, if we may use the expression, without being a scapegrace like Tom Heriot. He injured nobody. One time or other, though often considerably after date, he paid his bills. No man, or woman either, so far as he knew, was the worse for his existence, and yet——

There are a great many people who go harmlessly, pleasantly, through the world, who, if it ever occurred to them to place themselves by the side of a really useful member of society, and compare their lives with his or hers, would find themselves as much embarrassed by the contrast as Fanshawe was. But fortunately for the idlers of humanity, the contrast seldom strikes them with all the sharp distinctions of light and shadow which existed in this case. The *élégant* smiles complacently over the comparison, and finds in his own case a host of extraordinary circumstances which he feels to be really superiorities,

and which raise him to a level very much higher than that of the plodding fellow by his side, who, like Atlas, carries a world on his shoulders. The race-horse is less useful than the dray-horse, but how different! This consolation generally lays the most flattering unction to the souls of the ornamental portion of society. How is it possible that the fine lady could feel herself anything but superior to the domestic dowdy who does so much more than she, and is of such inferior importance in everybody's estimation? The butterflies of existence have always this comfort, or at least they take it in most cases; and no doubt Fanshawe, like other men of his acquaintance, had smiled and hugged himself on his superiority to the occasional industrial of his acquaintance who had toiled himself up into reputation at the bar, or made a slave of himself in parliament, while his schoolfellow lounged at his club, or fluttered in the Row, or (which was the most serious of his occupations) hunted or shot, or went fishing in strange waters. The comparison which had been suggested to him now, however, and the moral standard to which he had been

suddenly forced to fit himself, was of a very different kind from that of the successful barrister or rising politician. And the effect upon his mind was complicated by the creation of so many new sentiments and necessities in himself, that the comparison went much further than a mere external contrast could have done. Ambition—a thing he had never known in his life—had sprung up within him; acquisitiveness—a desire to have, to possess, and to enjoy; an impatience of the present aspect and conditions of life; a sense of disgust with himself and his circumstances. These were not moral qualities, let us allow, nor amiable, nor in any way an improvement upon the gentle and light-hearted contentedness of the past. I am simply stating facts, and not demanding any approval of them. This was the new development to which Fanshawe had come. His past easy life was odious to him; he wanted to become on the spot something totally different—something which seemed to him better, though morally it might not perhaps be so. Certainly at the first offset it was not a moral improvement. To

substitute dissatisfaction for content, uneasiness for calm, care and mental restlessness for the happy *insouciance* of a man undisturbed by any thought of his career, was neither an advantage to himself, nor to anybody near him. He who had been the most good-natured, easy-going, well-conditioned fellow known to his friends, became all at once moody, uncertain, unmanageable. He had resolved to "make a change," and he was pre-occupied, to the exclusion of everything else, with thoughts of what that change must be.

For it is a great deal easier to decide that you must turn over a new leaf, and that henceforward, instead of being useless, your life must be profitable to yourself and the world, than it is to decide how this change is to be accomplished. If every man when he begins to take thought of the more serious duties of life could immediately settle himself down as a landed proprietor, with an estate to manage, cottages to improve, farmers to influence, a seat on the bench, and a vote for the county, how many men would see their duty more clearly than

they have ever as yet seen it! But we cannot attain all this simply by resolving upon it, and Fanshawe did not know what else to do. He would have made a very creditable squire, and so would hosts of men who don't make much of their lives in any other way; but he could not dig, nor did he know how to employ his existence so as to fulfill his own wishes, and be of some use to others. He was too old for many things, too old for the army, even could he have done any good in it, too old for the bar, too old for business; for although men in novels can turn their minds to commerce whenever a blank comes in their career, and succeed in it—yet men in common life are usually trained to that branch of activity as to every other, and begin by an apprentice period, in which they earn nothing and do little. Even for the public offices he was too old, and what, Fanshawe asked himself, could he do in a public office? He ran all these things over in his mind till he was in despair. He was willing to do anything; but when he came to particulars, he found that his education had trained him to nothing except

those duties of a great proprietor which he had no hope of ever being able to exercise. Nothing is more difficult than thus to begin a new chapter in life. Had he required to earn his living, no doubt the energy which necessity would have given to his quest for employment might have found him something to do; but he had not that stimulus—and he had not the stimulus of aptitude for, or knowledge of, any special kind of occupation. He would have “done anything.” Was that but another way of saying that he was good for nothing? he asked himself sometimes, in partial despair.

And then putting all these new fancies aside, he had really so much to do in the early Summer. He had to look after his sick horse, to see a great number of friends, to answer invitations, to make some ordinary necessary preparations for the Derby and Ascot, and all sorts of other engagements. He had quite enough to fill his life with this ordinary round of trivial occupation, as it had been filled for all these years; and when he had returned to the usual circle of that life, it must be allowed

that it was not disagreeable to him. It felt natural ; and yet it was nothing—no good to him, no good to those among whom it was lived. No progress, either internal or external, was possible, so long as he continued in it. But what was he to do ? What even did he want to do ? Something, certainly—something that would restore him to the credit he had lost in his own eyes, that would make him worthy in Marjory's, that would improve his position, and help him to that natural growth and increase and elevation in life which had become so essential ; but yet nothing that he knew of—nothing that he saw other people doing. Poor good-for-nothing ! He wanted to “ better himself,” to be of some sort of use, to double his means, to make what was called establishment in life possible, to change himself, in short, from a nobody and nothing, into a man of some importance and consideration—a man fit to be trusted with the life and welfare of others. This was what he wanted ; but he had not the smallest inkling of how it was to be brought about.

One thing however he did, and at once—he

availed himself of the permission which Marjory had so unhesitatingly accorded to him, and wrote to her. He did this only a few days after he left Pitcomlie; indeed, he began his letter on the very morning of the day on which he left, when he was no further off than Edinburgh—but destroyed that first letter and various others before he produced the following, which at last, after many doubts, he sent. How to begin it was a puzzle to him. The only thing he had any right to say was “Dear Miss Heriot;” but, somehow, that sober and correct address did not seem to suit the circumstances. This cost him a great deal of thought; he could think deeply, connectedly on such a subject, though he could not think to any purpose, in respect to the occupation which he was so anxious for. His letter kept running through his mind during all the interval—four days—which elapsed before he made up his mind to send it; and at last, as will be seen, he began abruptly, with no formal start at all, which seemed to him, somehow, more congenial than “Dear Miss Heriot.” The letter was finished at midnight, but he left it open and read it over, and

added something to it next morning before he sent it off; and after he had fastened up the envelope, was in a dozen minds whether or not to open it again and revise it once more. No new beginner in literature was ever half so careful and anxious for the success of his first work.

“I avail myself very eagerly of the permission you gave me to recall myself to your recollection. It is not that I am worth your recollection, but because I cannot bear the idea of falling out of it. How can I sufficiently tell you what it has been to me to have felt myself one of the household of Pitcomlie, to have grown into its ways, to have been part of its life at so sad a moment? I feel almost as if you must think me unfeeling, unsympathetic in your sorrows, when I say that I am glad I was there at this time, rather than at another. I wonder if you will know what I mean? I grieve for you to the bottom of my heart, and yet I am glad that I was there. Life outside, life here in London, where, people say, and I suppose believe, there is so much movement and excitement, seems to me very tame and vacant. I can't think how my old friends can endure the mill-horse

round of engagements, all so null, so monotonous, and like each other;—because they have not been in Fife, I suppose. And yet Pitcomlie is very quiet, you will tell me? I wonder if you are there; or if the recent events have made it insupportable to you; or what you are doing? I keep thinking and wondering over this, and whether you will remember me again, or be so good, so very good as to tell me all I want to know, and answer me half of the flood of questions which are ready to be poured out upon you. May I ask them? I am sure at heart you are too good not to say yes or no. I want to know about Mr. Charles; whether he has left his tower, and his papers, and all those treasures which he was so kind as to show me; and about dear little Milly, whom I can no longer tempt to laugh at an unbecoming moment. How I should like to try! and to see her look of fright, which is her own, at her wickedness; and then that delightful gravity, which is yours, settling over her small face. I want to know everything about her, and about your uncle;—and anything you will tell me; any little scrap or crumb from your table—about you.

“ There are a great many things I should like to tell you about myself, if it did not seem abominable impertinence to hope that you would take any interest in such an indifferent personage. Nobody can be more thoroughly aware than I am how little there is to say about me, that would be pleasant to your ear. I have had one kind of dubious good quality in my past life, and that has been content; now I have lost that even. What a poor sort of affair is the life we live without thinking of it, we wretched fellows who are, I suppose, the scum, and float on the surface of the stream, going wherever it carries us, in a helpless, hopeless sort of way, that must appal and disgust any one who has ever known better. Having had a glimpse of the better, I am disgusted too, and begin to make a fuss among the other atoms, and long to cling to something, to oppose the power of the tide, and get some kind of independent action into me. I wonder if you will know what I mean? How often I find myself wondering this—asking myself if it would be comprehensible to you; or if you would simply scorn the poorer sort of being whose existence

has been so long without plan, or purpose, or pilot? This would be very natural; but I like to think that you would rather try to understand, knowing what a great thing it would be for me if you would take so much trouble. I am no theologian, and dare not pretend to speak on such subjects; but yet, if the angels would take the trouble to enter a little into our mortal concerns, how much good it would do us! Do not you think so too? or do you think I am talking nonsense? which very likely is the case, since I want to talk the best of sense, and mean a great deal, which I am not clever enough to say.

“May I write again soon? and will you give me a line—just a line—three or four words, if no more, to tell me that you still remember the existence of one who is always

“Your faithful servant,

“E. F.”

This letter Marjory read at the breakfast-table, seated between Aunt Jean and Uncle Charles, with little Milly opposite to her, and all the commonplaces of ordinary talk going on. How

bewildered would those good folks have been could they have read it over her shoulder! How bewildered did she feel reading it, moved to an interest which made her half indignant with herself, and feeling impatient with the writer for that restrained glow of feeling, which notwithstanding communicated to her a sympathetic thrill. "Ridiculous!" she said, and felt her cheeks glow, and her heart move a little, notwithstanding all she did to control it.

"That's a long letter, May," said Mr. Charles, looking at it with some curiosity as she put it carefully back into its envelope.

"It is from Mr. Fanshawe," she said, with a consciousness for which she could have taken instant vengeance on herself; "he has gone to London. He said he would let me know where he had gone."

"Oh!" said Mr. Charles; and Miss Jean's eyes lighted up.

Marjory let the letter lie by her plate as if it was of no importance, but felt her cheeks grow hotter and hotter. Ridiculous! She determined to write him a most matter-of-fact reply, which

should make an end of this discursive nonsense. If he thought she had leisure for a sentimental correspondence, she must convince him to the contrary; how absurd it was! And yet to be thus put upon a pedestal of absolute superiority, and worshipped in this covert way, is not in itself disagreeable. A little weakness stole about her heart; insensibly it occurred to her during the forenoon that there were several things she would like to consult him about. She slid the letter quietly into her pocket before she left the table. It happened to her to look at it again during the course of the day, just "to see what he had said" about his present occupations. As it happened he had not said anything. But how was Marjory to recollect that?

CHAPTER X.

MR. CHARLES HERIOT had not come to the High Street without an object. He had left Pitcomlie on the morning after Marjory left it, and had proceeded straight to his house in Edinburgh to review the capabilities of George Square; and he had not been very well satisfied with those capabilities. The house had not been inhabited since it had been in his possession. It was an excellent old-fashioned house, worth a dozen of the ordinary habitations which fall to your lot and mine, dear reader; but it was furnished with mere chairs and tables, book-cases and side-boards, not with any associations or kindly customs of use and wont. There was

some old spindle-legged furniture, which had belonged to some Leddy Pitcomlie in the beginning of last century, with which Marjory could have made a quaint corner to live in, in one part, at least, of the chilly, uninhabited drawing-room, converting it all at once into such a chamber as some Jacobite lady might have received the Chevalier in, or where Mrs. Anne Keith might have discoursed to young Walter Scott. But Mr. Charles's imagination was dulled by the vexations and embarrassments that possessed him, and he could not realize this; and his decision about George Square was that it would not do. The chain of habit was very hard to break with Mr. Charles; but when once broken, he was impatient, and almost lawless, rushing into any novelty that presented itself. The novelty in this case, however, was not extravagant. What he did was simply to take a house in St. Andrew's for the summer; and it was this which he had come to intimate to the household in the High Street.

“Not but what Marjory would be very happy with you, poor thing,” he said to Aunt Jean;

“perhaps more happy than I can hope to see her; but still it will be more of a change. After griefs like hers, and all that has happened, I have always heard that a change was the best thing; and as she’s used to me and my ways—”

“You need not apologize, Charles Heriot,” said the old lady. “If I ever deluded myself that I was to get a companion, it’s best to undeceive me; but I did not delude myself. I’m used to live alone, and no doubt after the first I would have gone back to my crabbed ways. But there’s one thing I must say. I’m fond of the girl, though she maybe does not give me credit for it, and she shall have all I’ve got to leave; I said in my haste she was my natural heir, and too natural, and a Miss Heriot doomed, all her days, like me. But mind this, if you take May away, I’ll no have her back. I give her to you on one condition, and that is, that you’ll marry her well. Marry that girl, and marry her well, and you’ll have my blessing, and I’ll think better of ye, Charles, than I’ve ever thought all your days.”

“Marry her, and marry her well!” cried Mr. Charles, in dismay; “and how am I to do that? I have never married myself, and neither have you.”

“That has nothing to do with it,” said Miss Jean, promptly. “The more reason that Marjory should; there’s enough of us poor dry trees, with nothing to leave behind. If you have any respect for the past generation, of which I’m the last representative, Charlie Heriot, you’ll do what I say. Marry her well; she’s worthy the trouble. She’ll make such a man’s wife as few men deserve, that’s my opinion. Mind, I’m not saying but what she might be mended; but marry her, and marry her well, Charlie, or you’ll get nothing from me.”

“Perhaps you would tell me how I’m to do it?” said Mr. Charles, with sarcastic seriousness.

“If you cannot find that out for yourself, you’ll never do it by my teaching,” said Miss Jean. “Well I know ye have but little sense, you useless men; but ye know other men, if you do nothing else. If it was a wife, now, that

I wanted for a likely lad, do ye think I could not lay my hand on one? aye, and bring it to pass, too, if there was not something sore against me. Keep your eyes open, and when ye see a man that's worth the trouble, take him to your house—since ye are to have a house; and meddle no more, Charlie Heriot, after ye have done that; meddle no more. The first step is in your power; but the rest they must do themselves, or it will never be done. That's my advice. Friends can do a great deal, but there's a leemit which they must never pass. Once let May see what you have in your head, and there's an end of it all. Without judgment, ye'll never succeed in that, nor, indeed, in anything else, as ye might have learned from the family letters ye are so fond of. But the Heriots have never minded their daughters; they have left the poor things to themselves. There's me, for example; not that I'm regretting my lot. A man would have been a terrible trouble to me; I could not have been fashed with a creature aye on my hands. But Marjory's young enough

to accustom herself to her fate, whatever that may be."

"I hope so," said Mr. Charles, with some impatience; "but if you think that I am going to take home every man about the Links to see whether our May is good enough for him—"

"That's just like one of your interpretations," said Miss Jean, with quiet scorn. "'Any man that's worth the trouble,' said I; 'every man upon the Links,' says he; it's just what a woman has to expect. And Marjory may have settled for herself, so far as I know. There was that English lad, that you and poor Thomas, like two wise men, had so much about the house—"

"Fanshawe? I don't think he has a penny," said Mr. Charles.

"Most likely no, or ye would not have taken such pains to throw him in the girl's way. He was not ill-looking, and he had a taking manner, and when the heart's soft it's easy to make an impression; she has a kind of absent look at times. And there's Johnnie Hepburn, not a great match, but well off, that would

give his two e'en if she would but look at him—"

"Johnnie Hepburn is not an ill lad," said Mr. Charles, inclining for the moment, if Marjory's marriage was to be brought into the foreground, to seize on the easiest way of deciding it; "but in the meantime," he added, recalling his thoughts, "neither marrying nor giving in marriage is in her head—or mine either—with three deaths in the family."

"Oh aye!" said Miss Jean; "ye need not tell me the importance of what's happened. Both to us now living and to all the race, it's a terrible thing to think of, that both sons should be swept away, and a poor little bairn with a strange woman of a mother, a mindless creature that kens none of our ways, should be all that's left to succeed. Never since I mind has anything happened like it. However, we must all die; but there's no the same necessity in marriage, and that's why I'm speaking. I'm old, older than all them that's gone. Before ye see me again, I may be on the road to Comlie kirkyard, beside the rest—which is one good thing," Miss Jean added, with her sharp

eyes twinkling, "of a maiden state like yours and mine, Charlie. No other family has any share in us. We are sure, at least, to lie with our own at the last."

"Ay, to be sure," said Mr. Charles, who was not thinking of any such consolation, and who was glad to recur to his original subject. "We'll live very quietly, and see no company. St. Andrews is one of the places where you can see many people, or few, according to your inclination; and I'll have my quiet game, and May will have her sister to take up her mind. For the time being, Aunt Jean, I cannot see that we could do better; and I will always be at hand in case of that foolish young woman at Pitcomlie going wrong altogether."

"I would let her go as wrong as she likes," said Miss Jean. "It's aye shortest in the end to leave folks free to their own devices. When she's done all the harm she can to herself and other folk, she will yield to them that knows better. But I must go and look after your dinners. You'll miss your grand cook with all her made dishes, Charlie. I hear it was you

that settled yon woman at Pitcomlie, and they tell me she's to be married upon Fleming (the auld fool), and they're to set up in some way of business. I cannot abide waste for my part, and when a woman that can cook—which she could do, I say it to your credit, though I hate a man that's aye thinking of what he puts into him—goes and gives up her profession and marries a poor man that wants nothing but broth, or maybe a stoved potatoe——”

“They should take up a tavern—they should take up a tavern,” said Mr. Charles, with some excitement. “Bless me! her collops are just excellent; and I know nobody that can serve you up a dish of fish and sauce, or salmon steak, or a tender young trout stewed in wine, followed with a delicate dish of friar's chicken——”

“The Lord preserve us from these greedy men!” said Miss Jean. “The water's in his e'en over his friar's chicken; which is as wasteful a dish and as extravagant as any I know. You must try to put up with my poor Jess's plain roast and boiled. It will be a trial, no doubt;

but I must go and give her her orders," said the old lady, marching downstairs with her cane tapping on every step. She went to the kitchen, and stirred up the artist there, whose powers were anything but contemptible, by sarcastic descriptions of her nephew's tastes. "You would think to hear him that nobody could dress a decent dish but yon woman at Pitcomlie." Miss Jean said, artfully, "and he's very great on fish, and thinks none of us know how to put a haddie on the table. It's not pleasant for an honest woman like you that have been born among haddies, so to speak, Jess; but you must not mind what an epicure like that may say. For my part, I'm always very well pleased with your simple dishes."

"Simple dishes! my certy!" said Jess to herself, when her mistress had withdrawn; and being thus pitted against her important rival at Pitcomlie, the *cordon-bleu* of the High Street went to work with such a will, that Mr. Charles was smitten with wonderment and humiliation.

"It is wonderful the talent that is hidden in out-of-the-way places," he said afterwards, when

describing this feast; and when you reflect that he did not know what sort of cook was awaiting him in St. Andrews, and did know that the good woman in George Square was good for nothing beyond an occasional chop, it may be supposed that his pretensions in presence of Miss Jean were considerably lessened. This gave Mr. Charles more thought than that other matter of the necessity of marrying Marjory. Now that Marjory belonged as it were to himself, forming indeed the very first of his conditions of existence, he did not see the necessity of any change. He said to himself, as her father had once said, "No husband would be so considerate of her as I am. She will never get so much of her own way again," and felt that the suggestion that Marjory should be married was an impertinence especially offensive to himself. That could be dismissed, however, with little ceremony. It was a more serious matter about the cook.

Some weeks, however, elapsed before the removal to St. Andrews was effected, and in those weeks things went very badly with the household at Pitcomlie. Fleming, being further aggravated

after Mr. Charles's departure, decided upon leaving at once instead of waiting for the term, which had been his first intention.

“ A man may argufy with a man,” he said, when he announced his final decision to Mrs. Simpson, “ but to put up with a wheen women is mair than I'm equal to. Stay you, my dear, if you think proper ; but I'm auld enough to take my ain way, and I'll no stay to be driven about by these new leddies. If it had been Miss Marjory, it would have been another kind of thing ; but, by George, to put up with all their tantrums, me an auldish man, and used to my ain way and very little contradiction, and a man engaged to be married into the bargain ! I'll no do't.”

This was a serious blow to the house. The footman, who had been thereupon elevated by Matilda to Fleming's place, was elated by his advancement, and conducted himself towards the maids in a way which produced notice of resignation from several of the women. And Mrs. Simpson, when it came to her turn to bear, unsupported by her Fleming, the daily burden of

the "new leddy's" unsatisfactory manners, struck work too, and decided that it was not worth her while to struggle on even for the short time that remained.

"I'm weel aware, mem," she said to Verna, who had attempted a private remonstrance, "that we should act, no as ithers act to us, but as we would that they should do. That's awfu' true; but I canna but think He would have made a difference Himself, if it had been put to Him, in the case of a servant. You see, naturally we look up to them that are above us for an example; we dinna set up to give them an example, which would be terrible conceited. And a woman like me, with a' the care of the house on her head, and slaving over the fire, dressing dishes that I have no heart to touch by the time they come to me—Na, na! it's no from the like of me that a Christian example should be expectit. And then you must mind it's said in the Bible as weel, 'I will be good to him that is good, and froward to him that is froward.' I humbly hope I'm a Christian woman, but I canna go beyond Scripture. And what is a month's wages to me? I've been long in good

service, and I've put by some siller, and I dinna doubt but you've heard, mem, that though I'm no so young as I once was, I have—ither prospects; and ane that will no see me want. So as for the month's wages, I've made mair sacrifices than that."

"The money is not much," said Verna; "but the character, Mrs. Simpson. My sister will be very much put out, and she forms very strong opinions, and she might say——"

"Your sister, mem!" the housekeeper answered in a blaze of passion; but then feeling her superiority, paused and controlled herself. "When Mistress Charles is as well kent in the countryside as I am, it will be time to speak about characters," she said. "Characters, Lord preserve us! am I like a young lass wanting a character? You're a stranger, Miss Bassett, and a weel meaning young leddie, that has nae intention to give offence, I ken that; and I think no worse of you for judging according to your lights; but when it's said that Mrs. Simpson, housekeeper for ten years at Pitcomlie, has left her situation, who do you think will stand most

in need of an explanation—Mistress Charles, or me? If I wanted a new place, it would not be to her I would come to recommend me. And as it happens,” said the housekeeper with modest pride, “I’m no wanting a new place; I’m going home to my ain house.”

“But, dear Mrs. Simpson, it will be so very, very inconvenient for us; what shall we do?” cried Verna, driven to her last standing-ground.

“I’m no blaming you, mem,” said Mrs. Simpson, with dignity; “but Mistress Charles should have taken mair thought what she was saying to a decent woman—that has never been used to ill language. If she wanted me to consider her, she should have shown me a good example and considered me.”

“This is what you have made of it in one month,” cried Verna, rushing into the room in which her sister sat. “She’s going to-morrow; she will not stay an hour longer. By coaxing, I got her to consent not to go to-night. This is what your management has come to. Every servant in the house is leaving at this horrid

term, as they call it; and you, who don't know anything of English housekeeping, nor the customs of the place, nor what you ought to do—"

"Oh, Verna; but *you* know!" cried Matilda, frightened at last by the universal desertion, and taking refuge—as was her wont—in tears.

"I know! you have refused my advice, and laughed at all my remonstrances; you have never listened to a single word I have said since that day when the will was read. I have made up my mind to give up, like the rest."

"Oh, Verna, don't! oh don't forsake me; what shall I do? If I am a little quick-tempered, is that my fault? I am always sorry, and beg your pardon. I will beg your pardon on my knees. Oh, Verna! and the Ayah going, and everybody. I shall get no sleep with baby, and no rest with all these worries. If you go and forsake me, I shall die!"

"You treat me just like one of the servants," said Verna; "except that I have no wages. I don't know why I should stay to be bullied and made miserable. I will go too. I can have the

Ayah to take care of me, and poor papa will be glad enough to see me again."

"Oh, Verna, for heaven's sake! for pity's sake, for the sake of my poor, poor unfortunate babies! You shall have everything you can think of; everything you would like—"

"Yes, all that is unpleasant!" said Verna; "the kicks, but not the halfpence; the battles with the servants, and everything that is disagreeable—"

"Verna! if I promise never to do anything but what you like, never to say anything you don't approve of—to do always what you advise me? Oh, Verna! if I say I will be your slave!" cried Matilda, throwing herself upon her sister's neck.

Then Verna allowed herself to be softened

"I didn't want to come," she said. "I came for your sake, and poor Charlie's. I don't want to stay; it's cold and wretched here; I like India a great deal better; but if I should try a little while longer, and make an attempt to keep you straight, will you promise to take my advice, and do what I tell you? It is of no use my stay-

ing otherwise. I am quite ready to pack up and go back to India; make up your mind what you will do."

"I will do whatever you please," said Matilda, dissolved in tears.

"For you know you are a fool," said Verna calmly; "you always were; when you came out a girl, and gave us all that trouble about the cadets in the ship—when you married poor Charlie, and led him such a life—when you came back here and insulted Miss Heriot, and made the house miserable; you have always been a fool, and I suppose you cannot be different; but, at least, you ought to know."

"Oh, Verna, I will!" cried the penitent; and it was thus with her blue eyes running over with tears, with her lips quivering, and her pretty face melting into its most piteous aspect, that Mr. Hepburn found the young mistress of the house when he went to Pitcomlie, charged with a message, which Marjory, wearied by his importunate desire to serve her, had invented for the purpose. He had not been thinking of Mrs. Charles. She was Marjory's supplanter to him, and a

thoroughly objectionable personage. But when he came suddenly into the room, and saw this weeping creature with her fair hair ruffled by her emotion, tears hanging on her eyelashes, her piteous little pretty mouth trembling and quivering, the sight went to the young man's susceptible heart. No secondary trouble, such as quarrels with her servants, or the desolation consequent upon that amusement occurred to him as the possible cause for the state in which he found her; no doubt crossed his mind that it was the woe of her widowhood that was overwhelming her. He stopped short at the door out of respect for the sorrow into which he had intruded unawares. He explained with perturbation that he was the bearer of a message; he begged pardon metaphorically upon his knees. "Pray, pray assure your sister that I would not have intruded for the world; that I feel for her most deeply," he said, the sympathetic tears coming to his own eyes.

"She will be better presently," said wise Verna; "and it will do her good to see some one. She indulges her feelings too much. Poor child! perhaps it is not wonderful in her circumstances—"

“How could she do otherwise? I remember Charlie so well; may I speak of him to her?” said this sympathetic visitor. .

Verna received this prayer very graciously; she said, “It will do her good;” and now she will have something to amuse her, she added, in her heart.

CHAPTER XI.

HEPBURN amused Mrs. Charles very much, though that was not considered one of his capabilities in Comlie. He roused her gradually from her depressed state into general conversation. After he had delivered Marjory's message, he stayed and talked, feeling a quite novel excitement and exhilaration in the fact of this social success, which was unprecedented in his experience. To be appreciated is doubly delightful to a man who is not used to much applause from his friends. Matilda was the first pretty woman who had "understood" him, who had permitted herself to be beguiled out of her private sorrows by his agreeable society.

He was not the less faithful to Marjory, who had possessed all his thoughts as long as he could remember; but still it was pleasant to be able to comfort the afflicted, and to feel that his efforts for that end were successful. After a while, when the tears had been cleared away, when a gentle smile had stolen upon the fair countenance before him; when she had yielded to his fascination so far as to talk a little, and to listen eagerly, and to look up to him with those blue eyes, Hepburn could not but feel that Miss Heriot must have been deceived somehow, and that so gentle a creature must be easy "to get on with," to those who would be good to her. For the first time in his life, he felt that there was something to excuse in the idol of his youth. Not a fault, indeed, but a failure of comprehension; and Marjory had never failed before in any particular, so far as her adorer knew. Perhaps the reason was that this gentle little widow was a totally different kind of woman. Various things he had heard on this subject occurred to Hepburn's mind to account for Marjory's failure. Women,

even the best and cleverest, did sometimes fail to understand each other, he believed, upon points which offered no difficulty to an impartial masculine intellect. This was not at all a disagreeable thought; it raised him vaguely into a pleasant atmosphere of superiority which elated him, and could not hurt anybody. He even seemed to himself to be fonder of Marjory from the sense of elevation over her. Yes, no doubt this was the explanation. Mrs. Charles had done or said something which a man probably would never have noticed, but which had affected the more delicate and sensitive, but less broad and liberal nature of the sweetest of women; and Marjory, on her side, as he knew by experience, uttered words now and then which were not destitute of the power to sting. Hepburn thought that to bring these two together again would be a very fine piece of work for the man who could accomplish it. A loving blue-eyed creature like this could not but cling to Marjory's strength, and Marjory would derive beauty, too, from the fair being whom she supported. Yes, he thought, as he looked at her, Matilda was the kind of

woman described in all the poets, the lovely parasite, the climbing woodbine, a thing made up of tendrils, which would hang upon a man, and hold him fast with dependent arms. Marjory was not of that nature. To be sure, Marjory was the first of women; but there was a great deal to be said for the other, who was, no doubt, inferior, but yet had her charm. Hepburn felt that in the abstract it would be sweet to feel that some one was dependent upon him. Somehow the idea crept to his heart, and nestled there; but Marjory naturally would not have the same feelings. Marjory would be disposed rather to push away the tendrils. It was a different sort of thing altogether between the two women. Thus Hepburn felt a delicious superiority creep over him as he sat and talked. He received Mrs. Charles's confidences about the servants after a time, and was deeply sorry. Fleming and the rest seemed to him a set of savages, taking advantage of this sweet young creature's ignorance and innocence.

“Let me manage it for you,” he said, eagerly. “I am not very clever about servants myself,

but I will speak to my housekeeper, who knows everybody. She will find you some one. Let me be of some use to you."

"Oh, that will be so kind!" cried both the ladies. Johnnie Hepburn had never felt himself such a man during his whole life.

When Verna had thus arranged matters for her sister's comfort, she herself withdrew to put the house once more in order, and to resume the helm of state. She shrugged her shoulders when she left the room, in which she left the new-comer quite happy, and Matilda in gentle good spirits.

"No wonder we think men fools," she said to herself; "and no wonder men think us fools," she added, philosophically, after a moment.

Thus it must have been decreed, she supposed, for the good of the species; and a blessed dispensation it was, if it could be confined to its present use of finding pleasant occupation for two incapables, and leaving those to work who could. But unfortunately Verna knew the process often went further than that. However,

for the meantime she felt it necessary to be content with the advantages secured to her by the collapse of her sister's authority, and the merciful and most providential provision of some one to flirt with, thus accorded to her at the moment of direst need. Verna employed her afternoon so well that she even came to terms with Mrs. Simpson, who acknowledged the difference of having to deal with a reasonable young lady, who knew what was due—It was a pleasant afternoon for Miss Bassett; for the first time she went over the house, and realized the character of the kingdom which had come into her hands by deputy. She visited all the linen-presses, all the store-rooms; she took a peep into the plate-closet; she went and inspected the old wardrobes, where lay many antique stores, old dresses, and piles of what Mrs. Simpson called "body-linen," and lace which made her mouth water. "This must belong to Miss Heriot, I suppose," she said, trying to recollect what was named in the will. Verna had never known what an old house was till now. She found oak cabinets and pieces

of furniture which she knew to be of value, heaped up in garrets and on the landings of the many-turning stairs. She found drawers upon drawers full of *chiffons*, which she could appreciate still better; and in every out-of-the-way cupboard there was some piece of china, some curiosity such as Verna had vainly longed for all her life. They were there unseen, lurking in corners, not prized or thought of, and too many in number to be made visible; there was enough to decorate half-a-dozen houses; old brocade gowns which would cut up into the loveliest chair-covers, and old Dresden, which, if gathered together, would fill a room by itself. Oh! only to have half-a-dozen pieces of it in the house at Calcutta, or in any other house which Verna might call her own! She was perfectly honest, and would not have taken a penny from Tommy's possessions for the world; but the china went to her heart.

And then she put on her hat and went round the house outside. She took a very comprehensive view, taking her double eyeglass, which she kept for important moments, and studying the

building thoroughly from every point of view. Women are deeply conservative, it is common to say; but at the same time there is no such iconoclast as an ignorant young woman longing for perfection, and secure in her own opinion. Verna thought the old house a most unnecessary adjunct to the new. The only useful part of it was the tower occupied by Mr. Charles, which would no doubt accommodate a visitor if the house was very much crowded—but then if a new wing was built there would be a great deal more accommodation. Verna built the wing in her imagination, drawing it along the further side of the lime avenue, and planting long windows open to the ground in the new drawing-room, which would be much “snugger,” she thought, than the old drawing-room which opened upon the cliff. She made a nice room for herself in the warmest corner facing to the south, for she was cold by right of being Indian, and liked to bask in the sun. How delightful was this sense of being supreme, this feeling of power, this capacity for doing as she liked! It seemed to her that she had fairly subdued Matilda, and that nothing

would tempt that incapable person, after her failure, to meddle any more with the affairs which she had so mismanaged; besides Verna meant to make her sister very comfortable; she liked people to be comfortable. She had no inclination to oppress, or to be unkind. She meant to do more for Matilda than she would have done for herself, indulging her to the top of her bent, and putting up with all her weaknesses. Even to the length of providing somebody to flirt with, of taking her to gaieties which they had both dreamt of as girls, and had read about in books, without ever having it in their power to taste their sweetness, Verna was willing to humour her sister; and so long as she would consent to be quiet and enjoy herself, asked nothing more from Matty. That she should enjoy herself was necessary, as this was the only expedient Verna knew to keep her contented. Finally she sat down on the steps of the sundial, where Marjory had sat so often, and turned over all her plans in her mind with a satisfaction which it would be difficult to describe in words. Nineteen years must elapse before Tommy should be of age. Nine-

teen years! a lifetime; and during that time there seemed no reason why she should not be virtual mistress of the place. To be sure such a thing was possible as that she should marry; but Verna knew herself well enough to feel that she could trust herself, and would do nothing contrary to her own interests. If some one should by chance turn up with an estate and house equal to Pitcomlie, who had sense enough to see what an admirable mistress she would make for it, why then, indeed, marriage might be attractive, and an improvement upon present circumstances; but without an inducement of this kind, Verna felt herself to be safe. What happy visions floated through her brain as she sat on the steps of the sundial, and looked at the house which was to be her kingdom! What a thing it is to come suddenly from poverty and obscurity into wealth, and ease, and honour, and glory! Mr. Bassett out in Calcutta was not badly off, but he had brought up his daughters very economically, and he had not concealed his desire to get rid of them as soon as possible. Verna had thwarted and provoked her father by not

marrying. He had sworn it was her fault, though she knew it was not her fault. Surely he could not wish nor expect her to marry a subaltern in a line regiment, which was all the Fates had sent in her way? But still he had been dissatisfied, warmly asserting that the business of girls who came to India was to marry—well, if they could, but anyhow to marry—a view of the case which disgusted his daughter; and there were complications about a second half-caste family of young Bassetts which made her very glad to escape from her father's paternal care. After all the storms that had surrounded her existence, and all the shabbiness of her beginning, and fear of future shabbiness in store, it may be imagined what it was to Verna when her ship suddenly sailed into this bay of plenty. She disliked cold winds generally, but the cold wind to-day, though it blew from the east, did not affect her as she sat on the base of the sundial and contemplated her empire. Not without a struggle had that empire been attained. She had almost despaired when she saw how her sister, in the strength of her folly, had put to

flight the Heriots, and emptied the house; but still she had been patient and bided her time, and that time had come at last.

Short-sighted young woman! She did not perceive, till she had put up her eyeglass, that Johnnie Hepburn was leading Mrs. Charles out from the open window to take the air upon the cliff. When she did see it, she congratulated herself only on having found some one to amuse Matty—for she had no eyeglass to remedy that short-sightedness so far as the future is concerned, which is common to the human race.

Quite late in the same afternoon, when it was dark, and Miss Jean's house was pervaded with fragrant odours of dinner, young Hepburn came in much out of breath, having walked very fast from Pitcomlie to fulfil his commission. He brought Marjory the books she had sent him for, with an excess of apologies for his delay, which, had she cared much about it, would certainly have enlightened her. He had been detained in the most remarkable ways, kept back by one thing after another. And he had found Mrs. Charles

very poorly, and her sister quite anxious about her. "I am afraid she is very delicate," he said, sitting in the dark in Miss Jean's drawing-room, where, as the family were nearly ready for dinner, the candles had not yet been lighted. There was a glow of ruddy firelight just where Miss Jean herself was sitting, but all the rest were in shadow. And from somewhere in the room there came a "humph!" which confused the young man; however, it could not be Marjory who uttered that exclamation.

"I am sorry if she is ill," said Marjory immediately after; and then there was a pause, which Hepburn felt embarrassing. He wanted very much to say something which would be mediating and conciliatory, but the atmosphere certainly was against him; it was repelling and chilly. Women certainly do not understand women, he said in his heart; both so charming! what a thing that it is impossible to bring them together! and then he cleared his voice and tried again.

"I am afraid she is not accustomed to our kind of life," he said. "India is so different. Old Fleming has left, and the housekeeper is leaving,

and they don't know what to do. I promised to speak to Miss Jean—"

"Speak to anybody else, Johnnie, my man, before me!" said Miss Jean, peremptorily; "I've seen the young leddy, and I was not struck with her. She's bonnie enough, I allow, to please a silly lad; but she's not of the kind for me."

This was a very offensive speech to the amiable peacemaker. In the first place, of itself, that "Johnnie" made an end of him from the beginning. Of all names to apply to an aspiring young man intending to assume an elevated position, and feeling himself a person of influence, it is, perhaps, the cruellest title. Marjory smiled in spite of herself, protected by the darkness; and Mr. Charles—for he it was who made up the party, repeated that "humph!" which had broken in so disagreeably before.

"Don't sit in the corner and hum, hum, like that!" said Miss Jean promptly; "if you have a cold, Charlie, go to your bed, and be taken care of; but I cannot bide a hoasting man. We're all in a hum, hum sort of way, Johnnie Hepburn. Go

away quick and change your clothes, and come back to your dinner ; we'll be more amiable then ; but come quick, for the fish will spoil ; and Jess's temper is none of the best. Lord preserve us all !" said Miss Jean, turning upon her companions with her hand uplifted, when he was gone. "That woman's turned the laddie's head, the first time he's seen her ! Now that's the old-fashioned way that used to be in my day ; and I respect the lad !"

"You ought to respect the lady," said Marjory. She was amused ; but yet not altogether amused. Johnnie Hepburn, for whom in himself she had a sort of elderly sisterly regard, had been her slave since ever she could remember. He had teased Marjory, and been very troublesome to her on many occasions ; but he had worshipped her at all times, never thinking of any other woman. Miss Heriot was very much inclined to laugh at his championship of Mrs. Charles ; but her amusement was mingled with a surprise which, perhaps, was not altogether agreeable. She had seldom been more startled ; and when he came back to dinner, and the lamplight showed his youthful counte-

nance considerably flushed with haste, or emotion of some kind, the wonder grew. The half-pique of which she was conscious, and which amused her too in its way, made Marjory somewhat satirical. "So you found Mrs. Charles very nice?" she said, when they were at table, looking up with a twinkle of laughter, which had been long absent from them, in her eyes.

"Nice?" said Hepburn, with hesitation. "Well, I do not know if that is the word I would use. It is touching to see a woman in her circumstances, so young and so——. She is very delicate, I think."

"She is very pretty, I think!" Marjory said, laughing.

Hepburn could not tell how it was that the laugh sounded so much less pleasant to him than ordinary. Was she laughing at him? She had done so before now, and he had only worshipped her the more. But now he had just come from the spectacle of grief, borne in a becoming manner, and it seemed almost wrong of Marjory to be able to laugh; it disturbed his ideal. He took care to say as little as possible about Mrs.

Charles for the rest of the evening, but still he did manage to intimate that he thought Marjory had not, perhaps, quite understood that delicate spirit. And Marjory replied that it was quite possible, but laughed again. Bell, the maid, was rather of Mr. Hepburn's opinion—that Marjory's capacity for laughter showed itself too soon.

“If it had been but the auld gentleman, indeed!” said Bell; “but three deaths, one after anither!” and Jess in the kitchen shook her head also, and said Miss Marjory had aye thought too little of appearances. They all kept a very close watch upon her, to make sure that she mourned enough, and not too much. Resignation is an excellent thing, and always to be encouraged; but resignation never was known to do more than smile.

And Marjory, I do not quite know why, wrote to Fanshawe that evening. She had meant to write to him some day or other; but it is possible that Johnnie Hepburn's desertion (though she had never made any account of Johnnie Hepburn), quickened her proceedings. She wrote him a most matter-of-fact little note, filling one page

only of a sheet of note paper—without a word in it that would bear two meanings, or, indeed, possessed any meaning at all to speak of.

“This will put a stop to any further nonsense,” she said to herself, as she wrote his address at his club—and she did this with much decision and promptitude. She was going with her uncle in a few days to St. Andrews; she was about cutting off all the threads that bound her to her old life. This was a bit of her old life, though it occupied the very last chapter. Fanshawe too, perhaps, might come back to Pitcomlie, and might think that she had not “understood” its new mistress. Marjory was about to begin a different kind of existence; she snapt this thread without, she thought, caring much about it; but it was better, certainly better, that it should come to an end.

CHAPTER XII.

THE house which Mr. Charles Heriot had taken in St. Andrews was one of the oldest in that old town. The rooms were somewhat low and the windows small, and its aspect outside was, perhaps, just a little prison-like and closed up. You entered by a little door in the wall, which seemed made for clandestine stealing out and in, for ladies veiled and muffled, and gallant gentlemen disguised in the cloaks of romance. This small and jealous entrance, however, admitted the visitor into an old court all bowery on one side with jasmine and roses, and affording on the other a pleasant peep of a velvet lawn and old-fashioned garden. The third side of the

square was filled up by the old house itself, upon which the sculptured arms of an old Fife family shone, over the door. This door was approached by high outside steps, under the shade of which appeared a lower door, which showed a red-tiled passage traversing the house, and another gleam of light and garden greenness at the other end. The sitting-rooms of the house were thus raised to a considerable height, and looked out from their small and deep-set windows on the ruins of the Cathedral and the blue sea beyond. Never were ruins more complete in their sunny annihilation of the past than the ruins of St. Andrews. They have a sort of typical character for the students of Scottish history. Here the noble, rich, and splendid Middle Ages, which have conferred upon other nations their finest monuments and recollections, lie buried, as it were, in utter effacement, not scorned any longer—on the contrary, reverently preserved and taken care of—but blotted out from all possibility of use, and even from all meaning. But yet there is one monument of the past which still stands fast and sure

as ever, the old homely, inarticulate tower of St. Regulus, belonging to a past which has no voice, a dark world which leaves everything to the fancy, and which has stood there through all changes for centuries, appealing by very absence of suggestiveness to that profound imagination which lies at the bottom of the Scottish character. The graceful clustered piers, the lovely decorated windows, the lordly breadth and majesty of aisle and nave, are too suggestive for that reticent and deep-seated faculty; but against the mysterious simplicity of that tower, which discloses nothing, no sacrilegious hand has ever been raised. It stands there in primitive gravity, plainness, lack of grace, as it might have stood in those days when the "pure Culdee, was Albyn's earliest priest of God;" flattering the mind of the nation with a subtle sense of its antiquity, consistency, unity in all ages. These reflections, however, are ours, and not those of Marjory Hay-Heriot, as she stood at the narrow window of her new dwelling-place, and looked out upon the same sea which washed her native headland. * Her eye sought that first, as is

natural to the eyes of those who have been born upon its margin. Over the old ruins she looked to the older, everlasting thing, which is never antiquated, but keeps its youth continually. She could hear the sea dashing over the pier, and see how it rose, marking with a white line of surf the sweep of the bay beyond. That was enough to satisfy Marjory, even though the intermediate foreground was filled up by ruins and graves. Nature is always consolatory; but Art not always, not even the pathetic art of antiquity and decay.

In this old house the diminished family settled down, not without some sense of comfort. Mr. Charles had his golf, and Milly all the fresh delights of the Links and the sands, the shops and the streets, all of which were sweet to her unsophisticated intelligence. She thought the shops very fine indeed, and liked nothing so much as to go with her sister to buy a ribbon or a handkerchief; and the Links, with the flutter of gay colours about, the red-coats scattered here and there among the groups of golfers, the dresses of the ladies in their sacred corner, or

fluttering about the outskirts of the ground devoted to the graver game, dazzled little Milly as with the pageant of an endless theatre, the thing most glorious to her eyes of anything on earth. Far be it from me to attempt to describe the ancient and royal game of golf. How shall a feeble feminine hand attempt to depict its delights and triumphs? St. Andrews is the metropolis of this—let us not call it game, but science. Here its professionals congregate, and its amateurs are happy. Twice round the Links in a day is the whole duty of man; and one round maintains him in that decent condition of moral respectability, falling short of excellence, but above mediocrity, which is in some respects a more comfortable state than that of supreme excellence itself. Mr. Charles fell into this pleasant duty the very first day of his arrival. He was one of the oldest members of that club which has seated itself at the entrance of the Links, like a watchful mother, with bow-windows from which it contemplates benignantly all the out-going and in-coming groups, and tables at which matches are made up, and stories told

of the prowess of Tom Morris and Bob Kirk, and how the General halved a game with the Captain, and how Mr. Innesmackie gave Dr. Boothby an odd a hole, and beat him. In these pieces of news everybody is as much, nay more, deeply interested than in all the affairs of the State. Mr. Charles went down to the club on the evening of his arrival. He was a little doubtful for the first half-hour whether, in his melancholy circumstances, after "three deaths in the family," it would be decorous for him to play; but these scruples were soon overruled.

"If there was anything fast or dissipated about it," said the Reverend Mr. Morrison, of St. Rule's, a member of the family which had had its blood vitiated by the introduction of the whaling captain, "I could understand your hesitation; but I play my game every day of my life, without its ever interfering with my duties' as a parish Minister; and your good brother, poor Pitcomlie, is the last man in the world that would have thought of such a thing. No, no, my dear Sir; play your game, and be

thankful to Providence, that gives us such a wholesome and innocent amusement. It's just one of our many privileges," said piously the excellent divine.

"That's true," said Mr. Charles, still a little doubtfully, "but if it could be supposed for a moment to show any want, on my part, of respect——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Heriot; nonsense, man," said Major Borthwick (there is a great collection of heroes on half-pay at St Andrews.) "We cannot turn ourselves into tombstones, however willing we may be. I had a foursome all settled for to-morrow with old Tom and another professional against General Maclasher and myself. The General is suddenly called to Edinburgh on some business about his son, who is going out to Bombay by the next mail, and the match will be spoilt. I was making up my mind to send round and tell Tom; but you're just about as strong as the General, as good and no more. You'll come in, in his place? You would not, I am sure, fail an old friend."

"I would not like to do that, certainly," said

Mr. Charles, "if you are sure you can find nobody better?"

"Have I time?" said the valiant Major. "It's ten o'clock, and by eleven to-morrow we ought to start—unless you would like me to stay up all night?"

"No, no, certainly not; if it's a real service to you," said Mr. Charles; and thus he was "led into it," as he said, to the relief of his conscience, and great satisfaction generally of his being. Shut out from his papers and collections at Pitcomlie, golf gave him new life, as indeed it seems to do to many personages whom the reader may see on that busy stretch of seaside grass, should he ever travel to St. Andrews. I dare not go further into details, neither dare I tell very much about the life of this lively sober place, which is the oldest metropolis of learning in Scotland as well as of golf. For did I enter into the subject fully, not the most scrupulous care to avoid personalities could save me from the reproach of being guilty of them. Did I place an "atomy" in the chair filled by a certain Jove-like presence, I should still be believed to be putting the Prin-

cial in a book ; and did I turn the gallantest of ancient gentlemen into an Orson, I should still be supposed guilty of sketching the Lord of the Manor. Far from me be such impertinencies. If you wish to become acquainted with the St. Andrews of social life, dear reader, go there and see for yourself.

As for Marjory, she was not permitted to sit in loneliness by her deep window, looking out upon the little homely pier and great magnificent sea, over the foreground of the ruins. Lady Castlemount called on the first practicable day, and so did all the ladies with territorial designations in the neighbourhood, such as Mrs. Haigh, of Highbarns ; Lady Walker, of Berbo ; Mrs. Home, of Strath, and many more—not to speak of the learned matrons of the University, and all in St. Andrews' town that was worthy of presenting itself to Miss Heriot, of Pitcomlie. Everybody came who was anybody ; and if Marjory could have been persuaded, like her uncle, that the mild form of golf practised by ladies was necessary to her health and comfort, abundant means of availing herself of the advantage of the Ladies' Links

would have been presented to her. But Marjory was not inclined towards the Ladies' Links. She preferred the bold cliff at the old castle, the long sweep of the East Sands and the downs beyond. The East coast has never been, so far as we are aware, distinguished for beauty or picturesque qualities, but the bold line of those cliffs, bound at their feet by black ribs of half-visible reefs, iron corrugations of nature running far out, low and dangerous, into the sea—but bordered above high-water mark by the softest verdure of fine grass, mossy and velvety, mantling every height and hollow—has a homely yet wild and free beauty of its own, which, with all the endless varieties of colour upon the broad sea and broader heavens, makes up a scene worthy alike of painter and of poet. Here and there the rocks which line the dangerous coast rise into weird masses, like towers of defence. One of these, the Maiden's Rock, has actually taken the form of a mediæval tower; further on is a more fantastic erection, where time and water have worn the living stone into a huge resemblance of a spindle. This quaint mass towers over a bay full

of broken rocks, among and over which the German Ocean dashes its stormy surf by times—while at other times it kisses softly, with many a twinkle of light and sheen of reflection, the stern stone which it has been undermining for ages, with apparently so little effect. The Spindle Rock was the favourite end of Marjory's pilgrimage. The most sensitive organizations do not always fall sick after those great mental whirlwinds of grief and excitement which are the milestones of our lives. But there comes to them a moment when quiet and repose are necessary, when the mind lies still like a hushed child, refusing to think more or suffer more, opening itself to some certain fashion of natural sound and sight, and getting healing from that pause of all efforts or processes of its own. Marjory, unknowing, adopted this fashion of cure. She walked out to the Spindle (a long way) and would sit there alone day by day among the rocks, gazing half consciously over the broad level surface of the familiar sea, now and then crisped by soft winds, and overarched by the broad vault of sky, which softened down in endless variations of blues and greens, widening and fading to the horizon line,

where sea and sky met in colourless brightness. The water lapped softly among the rocks, which here and there rose like pinnacles of some fantastic architecture over the brown uneven masses below. Among these rocks there were miniature oceans, crystal sea-pools lined with softest green seaweed like a nest, where some cunning crab lived secure, or where those bloodless, boneless things, which are half animal and half plant, spread out their antennæ, pink, or creamy white, or silver green, upon the water. The shining of the sea, the ever-consolatory sound of its murmurous voice upon the rocks, the occasional gliding past of a heavy fishing-boat with high brown sail, or the white butterfly wing of a rare pleasure-yacht, was enough to give occupation to the fatigued mind, which found healing in every hum of well-known sound, in every familiar motion of that native sea. Hush! said the soft long rustle of the water searching into every corner, rising and falling like the breath of some watcher. Hush! said the soft wind with a musical murmur about the lofty rocks; hush! said the dreamy whirr of insect life upon the grass beyond. The sun

shone warm, and little flecks of white clouds floated across the sky with the wind as the scattered sails did below. Soft motion, sound, murmur of life filling the whole vast sphere—nothing that seemed like ending, dying, sorrow. Marjory, who loved the sea like one to the manner born, accepted this tranquil hush without remarking how fatal were its other voices, and opened herself to the sunshine and had her wounds slowly healed

One day, however, going a little further than the Spindle, she found herself in front of a very homely thatched cottage, one of those odd little green-brown erections so extremely objectionable in a sanitary point of view, yet so satisfactory to the eye, which grow out of Scottish soil wherever improvement has not banished them, like the creation of nature. The walls were built of rough stone covered with the mosses of many years. The thatch was patched and ancient, bright bits of straw recently put in peeping out from the dark surface. The cottage consisted of a “but and a ben,” no more, that is a room on each side of the low and narrow doorway

—with one small window in each, facing to the sea, and a rude bit of so-called garden, surrounded by a little rough wooden paling enclosing the door. This cottage lay in a hollow between two cliffs, and was sheltered from the wind on each side; the short rich grass, like a warm cloak thrown over the sunny nook, mantled up to the very walls; and the cottage had all the sunshine, and as little of the chill as was possible. Marjory had vaguely noticed a figure seated near the door for two or three days before she approached it, and a certain curiosity had risen in her mind—nay, a something more than curiosity, a sympathetic feeling, that the other unknown woman was like herself resting after some convulsion of nature, and seeking restoration from the calm, and the sunshine, and the salt sea. This feeling grew to a strength which surprised her, when she saw the same figure languidly seated on the same spot the second day; and on the third some natural affinity drew the two together.

The girl at the cottage-door was younger than Marjory—very young, with fair hair folded back from a pale little face, and knotted loosely behind,

as used to be the custom years ago. A rusty black gown, with long close sleeves down to her slight wrists, made in the plainest fashion, threw out, into still further relief, the colourless face and locks, out of which illness seemed to have driven the tone of colour which had enlivened their paleness. There were little rings of pale gold upon her white temples, but the mass of her hair had lost its brightness. Her face was one of those pathetic faces which it is difficult to realize in the glow of happiness. Her eyes were grey, large, and lucid, with that liquid softened light which is like moonlight in a face. Her features were delicate and worn, the nostrils somewhat pinched with suffering, the very lips pale. Intense capacity for pain was in the face, and at the same time a quiet patience and power of suffering. She met the eye of the stranger who looked at her sympathetically, with a faint but friendly smile, and gave her the usual country salutation, "It's a fine day," with a softness of tone which touched Marjory, she could scarcely tell how. It was Marjory who made the first advance; but the

response was to her look, rather than to anything she said. The girl did not rise and curtsy, as an English girl of similar condition would most likely have done to greet the lady. But in her gentle attempt at acquaintance, and the soft little evanescent smile, with which it was accompanied, there was an appeal which only a hard heart could have resisted; and Marjory had a rural lady's habit of constant intercourse with her social inferiors.

"Yes," she said, "the weather is very fine for this time of the year. (It was June, but in Scotland it is difficult to calculate upon the weather so early in the summer). But I am afraid you are ill. Do you live always here?"

"Ay, mem, I'm not well," said the girl. "They have brought me here for change. It pleases them; and I like to hear the sound of the sea—not that it will do me any good. I am too far gone for that."

"You must not think so," said Marjory, with that instinctive denial of the plainest fact, which is human nature's first idea in the presence of approaching death. "You are very young, and the

sea always does good. Will you tell me what is the matter?"

The girl smiled again. "It's nothing," she said, "and everything—it's a failing; some doctors say it's decline—but it's no decline, it's just a failing. I'm thinking the chief thing is that I'm weary, weary of this life, and I would like to go—"

"But that is wrong," said Marjory, shocked. "At your age it is unnatural. You ought to resist such a feeling."

"What for?" said the girl, very gently. "They all say that; but I've gone over my Bible from end to end, and there is nothing against it. You're no to think I would do myself harm, for that would be a sin and a shame to them that's left behind. But Paul was wiser, far wiser than me, and he says, 'that to depart is better.'"

"To be with Christ," said Marjory, unconsciously correcting, and feeling somehow a certain consolation in the fact, that it was not Paul's saintly longing, but only human weariness that spoke.

“I’m meaning that,” said the girl, gently; and then with a sadder tone, “and to make sure that they are safe and well that have gone before.”

These words brought Marjory to a pause. The upraised face beside her, with those lucid eyes turned to the sky, seemed to be penetrating that blue veil with an anxiety only tempered by weakness. Marjory looked at her till tears came into her own eyes.

“Don’t you think we may trust God for that?” she said. “You have lost—friends?”

“And you are in black, too,” said the girl, quickly, “and I’m sure you sit about the rocks, as if you had no heart. Oh, I’m ready to trust God! but if you heard how our folk speak! and if one was taken suddenly—no thinking, in the middle of his days—one that had never made any profession, nor showed any concern about his soul—would you say then, ‘Trust God?’ That’s the question I’m aye asking myself.”

“I lost a brother so,” cried Marjory, moved to open her heart she could not tell why.

“Ah!” The girl looked at her fixedly for a moment, and pressed her thin hands together.

The cry had burst from her lips like an outcry of fear and pain.

“And I do trust God,” Marjory resumed. “God saw all he meant, not only what he did. Were you never misunderstood? We are better in our hearts than we are in our deeds; but God never misunderstands.”

“That’s true,” said the girl, clasping her hands again, “that’s very true. Oh, if you but kent what misunderstanding there is in this world? and whiles them that are most fond of you; but as you say, mem, never with God; that’s a great comfort. Sometimes I think my heart will break—”

“I am a stranger to you,” said Marjory, “but I should like to help you if I could. Is it anything you could confide to me?”

The girl’s face, so calm in its sorrowfulness, grew agitated. She gave one anxious look into Marjory’s face. She cast her eyes around, watching if anyone was visible. “No to-day, no to-day!” she exclaimed. “A stranger—what could I say to a stranger? But I’m tired, tired, and the wind is cold. I must go into the house—to-day.”

She rose as if in terror, and stumbled in her weakness. "I will go away," said Marjory, "do not let me drive you in-doors. I am going back to St. Andrews—"

Then the girl turned, holding out her two thin hands; a little hectic flush had come on either cheek. "I'm so weakly," she said, with a pathetic smile; "no fit for anything; but, oh, you'll come again?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE weather changed that evening, as was natural after three or four heavenly days. The East coast is not rainy like the West; but the soft continuous rain of the Western Highlands is scarcely so terrible as the westerly haar, which wraps everything up in white wool, and blots out sea and sky, and chokes the depressed wayfarer—not to speak of the penetrating chill which even in June goes down into the marrow of your bones, and makes the scrap of standing-ground, which is all that is left you in the misty world, as lonely as an alp, and as dull as a fen. Even the golfers at St. Andrews feel this miserable influence. When those bright links are reduced to

so many dark sepia blots, when the sky can be expressed only by the same woeful colour, when the surf on the sands seems to send up a blinding woolly steam over the faint and limp yellow of the cliffs; when his very red coat hangs limp and damp upon the hero's back, who goes out, notwithstanding the weather, and the best "driver" on the links cannot get his ball across the burn—then the very golfer is discouraged. But the population is accustomed to the infliction, and the matches still go on, and new fights are arranged in the club; and in the town, business and amusement proceed as usual, and the good people walk about the streets, and pay each other visits to keep their hearts from sinking. It is scarcely possible, however, though your heart may be stout, and your chest sound, to walk out to the Spindle in an easterly haar; so that Marjory did not see the new acquaintance who had interested her so deeply for some days. She saw, however, a sight which interested her almost as much, though in a different way—the young woman who had visited Pitcomlie the evening before her father's funeral, and whom she had

afterwards met at the family grave. It was in the chief street of St. Andrews that this meeting took place—a broad and handsome street, lined with old houses at the lower end, and terminating at the upper in an old gateway, one of the few perfect relics of the past that remain among so many ruins. Marjory was walking with little Milly, as usual, by her side, pressing into her very steps—her golden hair asserting itself as a point of colour, even in the persistent greyness of the street and the mist of the atmosphere.

“May, May!” Milly was saying; “there is a lady bowing to you from the carriage-window yonder; there is a gentleman taking off his hat. Why don’t you pay any attention? If it was me, you would say it was not manners.”

“Come in and look for a book at Mrs. Fletcher’s,” said Marjory, by way of repelling this attack. Milly was already a prodigious novel-reader, and instantly caught at the bait. Her sister stood at the door of the shop, while the little girl ran in eager to survey the many antiquated volumes, and the few fresh ones which form the circulating library of a country town.

Of the many passers by who went ghost-like through the mist, a great many knew and saluted Miss Heriot, of Pitcomlie; but it was on one who did not salute her that Marjory's attention was fixed. The dress was precisely the same as that of half the other women moving about the town, but yet the little brown hat and cotton gown suddenly grew individual and remarkable, as Marjory recognized the wearer. She was walking briskly along, with the air of one profoundly occupied, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. Suddenly she raised her head as she passed in front of the shop door where Marjory stood, and their eyes met. The young woman grew suddenly red; she gave Miss Heriot a quick, defiant look, and would have passed on without any recognition. Marjory was startled and excited, but she did not lose her presence of mind; she made a step out from the door. "Surely you know me," she said quietly. The young woman paused, as if perforce, but held her ground.

"Yes, Miss Heriot, I know you very well; you've spoken to me twice before—when I was

not wanting," she added doggedly, "to speak to you."

Marjory had some difficulty in keeping her temper, for this persistent resistance was provoking, to say the least. She said with some haste: "There can be very little reason why I should insist upon speaking to you."

"I ken none, Miss Heriot."

"Well!" said Marjory, with an impatient sigh, "neither do I. You know, I am sure, a great deal more than I do. But remember—you may be sorry some day for having refused to tell me what you wanted at my father's house; and by that time it may be too late."

She turned away, disturbed vaguely, as she had always been, by the appearance of this strange woman; but her withdrawal seemed to affect the other more than her questions had done. Before Marjory had re-entered the shop, the stranger spoke in a hesitating tone: "Miss Heriot, I am meaning no harm to you; there is, may be, something that I may come and tell you—that concerns you and yours, as well as me and mine; but I canna do it now. I thought you

were artful and proud, but now I think you're true. Maybe there is nothing in it; if there is, I will tell you the first. But I will say nothing till I hear the truth."

"What truth? Then tell me your name, at least!" cried Marjory, her heart beginning to beat loud with wonder and excitement.

"No, Miss Heriot, I'll no tell you my name."

"Do you know you are very rude, very uncivil?" cried Marjory, stepping back with a flush on her face.

"Maybe!" said the other, recovering her self-possession, which had been momentarily impaired. "I'm no a good judge what's civil and what is uncivil; but I'll no tell you my name—nor anything about me; unless it is true."

And with these words the stranger walked away, not pausing to hear what Marjory had to say. This meeting had a painful effect upon her. She pondered over it for the next few nights and days, wondering, with a bewildered sense that her wonder was vain, what it could mean. If what was true? or what did it, what could it matter to the Heriots whether something

known to this girl was true or not? She tried to scorn it, as some vulgar bugbear, probably concerning something quite unimportant; but she could not succeed. What was it? she kept saying to herself. She could not mention it to her uncle; she could not confide anything so serious to little Milly. What could it be? And the more a mystery of this kind, however petty, is kept to its original possessor, the more it vexes the mind, and becomes a daily annoyance. If Fanshawe had but been there! Him she could have consulted; with him she could have talked it over, and wondered aloud, and received strength from the wonderings of another. Probably between them, they might have come to some reasonable conclusion, to some explanation of the mystery. She was almost half-tempted to write to him, as the only person who knew about Isabell's letter, the only one who could understand what she meant. Almost, but not quite; a hundred reasons of womanly reluctance, shyness, disinclination to avow her dependence on the opinion of another, came in to prevent the imprudence; but yet it was something strange

in Marjory's history, something new in her mind, that such an idea should have arisen in her. She quenched it with a certain shame.

And oddly enough, one of these days, Mr. Charles brought home a friend with him to dinner, who knew Fanshawe. I do not pretend to disclose exactly the sentiments which moved Mr. Charles. Miss Jean's advice had never quite gone out of his mind. He was of the kind of man to whom an injunction, of whatever character, carries weight, and who feels that when a charge of any sort is laid upon him, whether accepted or not, it becomes a duty, and must be fulfilled. His good sense and his feeling of propriety struggled vainly against the prejudice of doing what he had been told. Instinctively, he looked about the links for men who were worthy of being introduced to Marjory. He made a little mental cross against the names of those who were specially endowed by any of the gifts of Providence, who were handsome, or wealthy, or well-spoken of. "Would So-and-So please her, I wonder?" the old man said to

himself, with a comical terror of the older woman, who had given him this commission; and with a faltering heart he had obeyed her behest, and under the most transparent pretence of accidentalness, had already taken home with him two or three of the best men he could find. On such occasions, Mr. Charles did his best to look perfectly innocent and at his ease. He made in private many and voluble apologies to Marjory.

“ I sometimes feel the want of a little conversation, my dear. Not but what I am perfectly happy in you, that are a far better talker than most folk. But a little change, you know; and it is good for you, too, Marjory. You may think not, and even you may not care for it at the moment; but depend upon it, it is good for you. It's a break upon the monotony. It prevents you from falling out of the way of society. And I know you are too good a housekeeper, May, ever to be taken unawares in respect of the dinner.”

“ You mean you are too particular about good

cating to make it possible," said Marjory, smiling. "But, Uncle Charles, of course you must see your friends when you please. You do not require to make excuses to me."

"It is not that, not quite that, my dear," said Mr. Charles, perplexed, not knowing how to avow that he would gladly have done without those friends; and the same little epilogue had been performed several times without the least apparent effect produced either upon Marjory or the eligible persons thus brought to see her. Marjory, perhaps, was somewhat disposed to retreat into her mourning on these occasions. She was perfectly civil and friendly to her uncle's friends; but she kept them in that category, and never allowed them to become her own; and as Miss Jean had made the express condition that Mr. Charles was to interfere only so far as the first step was concerned, the poor man was still more confused and perplexed by the utter failure of his expedient. He had no head for such delicate negotiations; he never asked the same person a second time, nor took

any steps to promote intimacy. That was not in his instructions. However, for once he did succeed in rousing Marjory to energy at last. The guest who knew Fanshawe was a Scotch squire, who had been a friend of Tom's, and whom Marjory, too, had known in former days. There were reasons for inviting him of a perfectly feasible character, and which required no apologies from Mr. Charles.

"I've brought Walter Seton to see you; we'll give him some dinner," he said, as he knocked at the door of Marjory's dressing-room, without thinking it necessary to apologize; and Marjory was more open, more friendly than usual to the old friend. It was not till after dinner that the conversation took place which moved her out of her friendly calm. Milly had come in, as the fashion of the house was, and taken her place by her sister's side. It had been the old fashion in the days when Milly was the light of her father's eyes. The little girl's chair was drawn as close to Marjory's as the conditions of chairs would permit. She stole her hand into her sister's under the table. Milly, indeed, had

no independent being when Marjory was by. She was a bloom growing on the stem of the elder flower.

“I hear you had Fanshawe at Pitcomlie,” said Mr. Seton, with complacent calmness, and without a suspicion that he was about to make himself intensely disagreeable. “Is he any steadier than he was, I wonder? You had him for some time at Pitcomlie? Somebody told me he was on a long visit.”

“Ah, yes. We had him for a week or two. Is he not steady, then?” asked Mr. Charles.

Marjory had pricked up her ears, and so did little Milly, to whom Fanshawe was an example of everything admirable in man.

“Well,” said the other, shrugging his shoulders, “I know nothing bad of him; but he’s a sad unsettled fellow; amiable, and all that, but, I fear, a good-for-nothing—a ne’er-do-well, as we say in Scotland. It is odd how many agreeable men belong to that species. For he’s a nice fellow, a pleasant fellow. Didn’t you think so, Miss Heriot? All ladies do.”

“He was good for a great deal when he was at Pitcomlie,” said Marjory, feeling her cheek flush in spite of herself. “A kinder friend never appeared in a melancholy house.”

“He was all that—all that,” said Mr. Charles, hastily.

“That is exactly what I should have expected to hear,” said Seton. “You have hit off his character in a word. Ready to do anything for anybody; always serviceable; good for other people’s concerns, but letting his own, you know, go to the dogs. When I said good-for-nothing, I ought to have said good for everybody but himself.”

“That’s a fatal kind of amiability,” said Mr. Charles, falling into this depreciatory estimate with a readiness which disgusted the two feminine partizans, to whom it was impossible to see their friend assailed without striking a blow in his defence. “I have known many men like that, nobody’s enemy but their own—”

“I think you would speak a little more warmly, Uncle Charles,” said Marjory, with a

burst of which she was herself ashamed, "it you remembered all that Mr. Fanshawe did for us. Amiability does not make a man do what he did. Have you forgotten poor Tom's bedside? and all his kindness to my father, and after—I beg your pardon; it is bad taste to introduce our private matters. But, Mr. Seton, I should be a wretch if I allowed anyone to speak disparagingly of Mr. Fanshawe without telling what I know."

"Yes, yes; I quite understand," said Seton, with a suppressed smile. "Ladies always give him that character. He is the most serviceable fellow. But I speak of his own concerns; he is a very unsatisfactory man to have anything to do with in business, for example. He is as ignorant as a woman—begging your pardon again, Miss Heriot. He is a nice fellow, but thoroughly unsatisfactory; as unsettled as a man can be; a complete rover, here to-day and gone to-morrow. I like him very much myself. I don't know any pleasanter companion; but that's his character.

Socially, of course, it doesn't matter; but it's a great pity for himself."

"No doubt about that," said Mr. Charles; "a great pity. What are his means, now? That would be a kind of a way of judging."

"I do not see that we are the people who ought to judge him," said Marjory, rising from the table; while little Milly, with all her golden locks on end, holding by her sister's dress, and turning looks of fire and flame upon the calumniator, rose too, in a flush of childish fury.

"Oh! how I would have liked to have done something to him!" cried Milly, as soon as they had got to the safe shelter of the drawing-room. "If I had been a man, I would have fought him, May! Our Mr. Fanshawe, that is good for everything! I hope Uncle Charles will never, never as long as I live, bring that man here again!"

"I hope so, too, Milly," said Marjory, breathing quick in her suppressed excitement; and she seated herself at the deep window over-

looking the Cathedral ruins and the sea beyond, with her arm round her little sister. Milly's hair spread over their black dresses like sprinkled gold; Milly's little heart beat against the bosom in which another heart was beating still more warmly; with indignation — only with indignation, and generous resistance to wrong.

It was the longest day of the year. What lingering silvery light, what soft tints of pale celestial colour, what opal radiance of enchanted hours that are neither day nor night, is involved in that description! I do not know what these evenings may be in the region of the midnight sun; but they cannot possess such mystic, poetic light as do the long Summer nights in Scotland, too poetic for any weird glory of unnatural shining. The young woman and the child sat enshrined in this visionary radiance long after Milly ought (I allow) to have been in bed. Mr. Seton had an engagement at the Club, and did not, fortunately, return to the drawing-room. His presence would not have been appreciated there.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was according to all the rules of that condition into which Marjory was gliding unawares that next morning she should receive another letter from Fanshawe, which, however, was not the second nor the third. The incident had lost all its novelty, and become common enough in her experience. And there could be little doubt that these letters conveyed to her, with all the subtle difference which exists between a man's self-accusations and the censures of another man, very much the same tale which had been told by the visitor of last night. Fanshawe allowed in so many words that he was good-for-nothing; he told her in covert language, but still plain enough, that he

had been roused by meeting her into thoughts of, and dreams after, better things. But he did not tell her what better thing he was doing, what attempt he was making to attain a career worthy of a man. And probably had she been able to see him as he was at that moment, dropped back into all his old habits, occupied with his old busy round of idleness, and keeping up just enough of his nobler discontent as found utterance in his letters to her, Marjory would have felt with a pang that Seton was right and she herself wrong. She had a vague uneasy feeling to this effect, even while she read the unintentionally deceptive and skilful sentences by which he appealed to her sympathy, and by which he secured that sympathy, notwithstanding the sense of something unreal which floated vaguely over the surface as it were, stopping her in the full course of interest and belief. She said to herself uneasily, why does he not do something? or why, if he cannot do anything, should he lament over it? Had he been silent, Marjory would not have thought upon the subject; but Fanshawe, who knew no other means by which to recommend

himself to her, unconsciously followed Mr. Seton's lead. He abased himself, hoping to be exalted. He mourned over his uselessness, expecting her to receive these lamentations as virtue. And Marjory indeed, though she faintly perceived a certain hollowness in the lamentations, did accept them as such. She took a rapid survey of the position, and asked herself, if it was all true, wherein he was inferior to other men? Seton, who had accused him, how was he better? He had an estate to look after, which gave him a certain anchor, and object in life; "and I have no doubt he manages it very badly," Marjory said to herself, with a certain spitefulness. And her uncle, for example, who had given up Fanshawe's cause, and had shaken his head over the idea that he was nobody's enemy but his own, of what practical use was his life that he should shake his head at another man? Marjory grew hot upon this subject in her private thoughts. The Pitcomlie papers, the portfolios of prints, and the golf at St. Andrews! Did these serious occupations give one man a right to erect himself in superiority as fulfilling all the duties of life over

another? Marjory walked down to the Links in her fervour, and watched all the men going out for their game. Some of them were hardworking men taking their relaxation; but a great many of them were gentlemen living at home at ease, and considering, as we have before said, that two rounds of the Links was the whole duty of man. A meritorious individual who had won his game before luncheon, came sailing up to her with satisfaction beaming from every wrinkle. He had no sense of being a useless member of society; but probably he would shake his head at Fanshawe, who played no golf, and who could be, when occasion served, the truest, most self-denying of friends. Nobody's enemy but his own! And whose enemies, then, were the busy groups on the Links? extremely busy—at what? Such were Marjory's bitter feminine thoughts—thoughts which probably would never have crossed her mind had they not been provoked by injudicious criticism.

“I have not time to speak to you, May,” said Mr. Charles, waving his hand to her. “I am

engaged for a foursome; and if I am late for dinner you must not be surprised, for I am very busy to-day."

"Oh, very busy, I see," cried Marjory, "and most usefully employed, uncle."

"Yes, my dear, there is nothing in the world so good for the health," he said, hurrying off with his long legs, and a countenance of the utmost importance and seriousness. And it was he who had said of Fanshawe that he was nobody's enemy but his own!

Little Milly was golfing too, at the Ladies' Links, whither some youthful companions had beguiled her from her constant clinging to her sister's side. "But I'll come with you directly, May, if you want me," cried youthful Milly, ready to throw down her club at a moment's notice. What a pretty sight it was!—groups of pretty girls (the girls are all pretty in St. Andrews) in the picturesque dresses of the period, looped up at every available corner, with bright flying ribbons, bright-coloured petticoats, a patch-work of brilliant colours—and such quantities of bright locks ruffled by the breeze, as might have

set up a hair-market on the spot—were scattered in knots of two or three over the smooth slippery velvet of the grass. Across the burn on the other side, were the darker groups of the men, relieved by, here and there, a red coat. Yellow heaps of sand, upturned by the sea, which was little seen but much heard, and great rough whin-bushes scattered about the “bent,” or rougher edge of the Links, with a background of blue hills, and enough trees to swear by on one side—and on the other St. Andrews, on its headland, the sun shining full upon it, upon its grey towers and white houses, and the stretch of sea which filled in the landscape. The prettiest scene! Marjory was half softened by it, yet turned away with a certain scorn that did not belong to her nature. These were the people who found Fanshawe a good-for-nothing, nobody’s enemy but his own!

She made a long course to the Spindle after this, and I avow that it was a long walk for a young lady alone; but then she was in a condition in which our own thoughts are our best companions; and she liked the soft silence, the

long meditative walk, the murmur of the sea. The day was fine, and shone with that pathetic brightness which a Scotch Summer day so often has after a storm—as if Nature made anxious amends to her children for those frequent interruptions which she could not prevent. The sea was full, washing up to the very foot of the grey fantastic rock. Little blue wavelets, fairy curls of foam, crept about it, as if trying to soften the silent giant. They came up in little childlike rushes, as of glee irrepressible, to the very edge of the mossy grass ; and Marjory had not been long there before she perceived the girl in whom she had been so much interested, wrapped in a shawl, and seated in her former place before the door of the cottage. An old woman, with the old “mutch,” bound with a black ribbon, which has almost fallen out of use in Scotland, stood in the doorway. She had just placed a pillow to support the sick girl, and was looking at her wistfully, with an evident love, which had seriousness, and even severity, in it. Marjory went up to her with some eagerness. She was welcomed with a smile from the girl, who rose faltering in her pleasure.

“Eh! but I’m glad to see you!” she cried; then dropped into her chair, too weak to stand. She seemed to Marjory to look even feebler than on the previous day.

“Good day!” said Marjory, addressing the old woman at the door; “I am afraid she is very weak; has the storm harmed her? and will you let me ask if she has the wine and strengthening food she requires? I beg your pardon if I am taking a liberty.”

Scotch cottagers are not always to be depended on in such particulars. Marjory knew that she might be speaking to some one as proud as a grand-duchess, though arrayed in an ancient mutch.

“I thank ye kindly, mem,” said the old woman, “we need nothing; but it was a kind thought. Na, she’s wanting for nothing, nothing; except an easy conscience, and the comfort of them that tell the truth.”

“Poor child,” said Marjory; “I am sure she tells the truth.”

“And that I do!” said the girl. “Oh, leddy, you said God never misunderstood; bless you for

that; but whiles the best in this world do, and the kindest—Oh, mother, dinna speak. This lady's heart speaks for me; she does not blame me. Tell her nothing but what I tell her. And if you would be real good and kind, mother dear, let me speak to her in peace."

"I'll do that!" said the mother, with a movement of anger; but in another moment she called Marjory aside with a sudden gesture, and whispered to her. "This lass," she said, solemnly, "God help her; she'll never be better; she's my youngest, and she dying before my very ein. But she's dying with something on her conscience; she tells me one story, and this horrible world believes another. She's taken a great fancy to you. Oh, my bonnie leddy, take pity upon a poor family that's heart-broken; bid her no go down to the grave with a lie in her right hand. I'll forgive all the meesery and the shame if she'll tell the truth."

Tears were glittering in the woman's eyes; tears which did not fall, but moistened the eyelids with a painful dew—though the eyes were red, as if they had wept much.

“If I were in your place I would believe her,” said Marjory. “Did she ever tell you lies before?”

“Never, never! never till now!” cried the mother; and two tears fell on the apron which she raised to her eyes hastily; but she added: “She never had any occasion; she never did a thing to be ashamed of—my poor, poor bairn!—till now.”

“I would believe her now,” said Marjory, who thus suddenly found herself involved in a family tragedy. The girl was looking uneasily towards her; the mother shook her head.

“Oh, if I could!” she said; “but go to her, go to her, my bonny leddy; and if you would speak a word!”

Marjory seated herself on the grass by the invalid's feet; she was beginning to say something about the storm, and the interruption of her walks, but the sick girl was too much interested in subjects more important. She looked down upon the young lady with a sickening anxiety in her pathetic eyes. “Did she say anything?—anything to make ye leave me—anything to turn

your heart?" she said, wistfully taking hold of Marjory's dress.

"Nothing!" said Marjory. "She said you had something on your conscience. My poor girl, I believe all you said to me; but if you could relieve your mother by telling her anything you have not told her?"

"Oh! no, no!" cried the girl; "there is nothing I have not told her. It is all true—as true as the Holy Gospel. I would bear shame if I deserved it. I would na' shrink from my just recompense. I'm bearing it now, and falsely, and it's killing me; but the truth, and that alone, I will say."

Marjory looked up at her with a strong and yearning pity, which she herself scarcely understood. It seemed to her that she would like to take the matter in hand, and clear the truthfulness of this delicate ailing creature, who looked so shadowy and worn, and pale. Whatever her fault might be, it appeared hard to pursue her to the edge of the grave with reproaches, as her mother seemed doing. She was young enough to be forgiven, Marjory thought, almost whatever

she had done ; young enough to be pardoned for maintaining some fiction of self-defence, whatever it might be. So young—and yet so near, it seemed, to those gates of death which shut upon everything, making an end of all pretences. “Poor child !” Marjory said, unconsciously, as she looked at her. The sight of such a creature dropping slowly, visibly into the grave at her age, was enough to move a heart of stone, without any addition to the sadness of the sight.

“I am twenty,” said the girl ; “you think me younger than I am ; and I’ve lived a long life, though I am not auld. I have had sad changes, hope and fear, and then a bit blink that was bright, bright, and then darkness, darkness, wherever the eye could see. It is hard enough to bear that when your own folk stand by you ; but when they are turned against ye—and dinna believe ye—”

“Does no one stand by you ?” asked Marjory.

“My sister,” said the girl. “She’s good, good, better than anyone I ever knew. She has given up her place to be near me. She puts her trust in me—which is a great strength when you have

to face doubt. Oh, if I could be sure I would live till it's all cleared up! But it would be hard, hard, to die before—though I can do that too—if the Lord will—But oh, seeing it's the triumph o' truth and right I'm wanting—seeing it's no for mysel, for I must die sooner or later—do you no think He's sure to grant it before I die?"

"I do not know what it is," said Marjory; and then feeling as if what she said was unkind and cold, she added quickly, "I hope you will live long, and see better days. You are so young—"

The girl shook her head. She held up her thin hand, interrupting the words. "I have no wish for length of days," she said. "Many a time I've wondered how it was that long life was made so much of in the very Bible itsel'. But that was in the old days, before our Lord's time, when folks knew little about it, or where they were going to. I mind, aye, a verse of a poem that runs in my head,

"The saints are dead, the martyrs dead,
And Mary, and our Lord, and I
Would follow with humility."

that's bonnie. Are you fond of poetry?"

"Yes," said Marjory, in her surprise.

"You wonder to hear me say it? but we aye liked reading at home—though maybe not the like of that—and there were many things that I tried to learn."

"I see that you have had a very different education from most girls," said Marjory, with a certain buzzing and confusion of wonder in her mind, which puzzled herself. Some curious broken lights seemed to glimmer into her thoughts. She could not tell what they were, or what they meant; but a sensation of pain came over her in the midst of her wonder, pain for which she was quite unable to account.

"No—no that," said the girl. "I liked it for itself, and so I tried; but oh, it's a' past now—a' past and ended. I read my Bible most. My mother says the other books put things in my head. And oh, what wonders and mysteries there are in the Bible, more than anything in the other books."

"But your sister always trusts you, and is good to you?" said Marjory. Her mind was

disturbed, and her curiosity most warmly awakened. She would gladly have put some leading question to procure further information, but this seemed all that it was possible for her to say.

“Oh, ay, very good,” cried the sufferer. And she wandered off into those religious speculations, founded upon strong and child-like faith, yet having the appearance of doubts and questionings, which are so familiar to young and gentle souls chiefly occupied with the other world and its concerns. Marjory sat and listened, and interposed now and then a word. And thus a simple sad young soul unfolded itself before her, full of deep wonder, and pain, and sorrow, recognizing God’s hand in all the events of earth, and longing for an explanation of them—as only the truest faith can long. The poor girl thought herself wicked in some of her questionings—she thought no one had ever entertained such theories before. She poured forth all her chaos of pious difficulty upon Marjory’s ears, and it seemed to the hearer, who was so much more accustomed to the world, that these doubts and difficulties were

more devout than anything she had ever heard in her life. As they thus sat, another woman, this time the mistress of the cottage, came out, and suggested that the invalid had been already long enough out of doors. She was an honest country-woman, with an anxious expression in her face, and she made signs apart to Marjory, begging her to wait. After the girl had gone in, which she did reluctantly, and with many entreaties to her new friend to come again, this good woman hurried after Marjory. She came up to her breathless, with heightened colour and anxious eyes. "Eh, mem, you're a real leddy, and real good to poor folk, it's easy to see that. I wanted to ask just one question. What do you think of her? I can see you'll tell me the truth."

"I am afraid she is very ill," said Marjory, gravely; "and very weak."

"Oh, it's no her health I'm thinking of. She's all that; but though Death is awful in a house, I'm no one that would put a dying creature to the door. It's other things. We're decent folk—and never have had a clash or

a story about one of us, as long as I can mind. Am I right in keeping the like of her in my house?"

"But why the like of her?" said Marjory. "She seems to me a little saint." She thought for the moment that the poor girl's most innocent "doubts" had affected, perhaps, some one of Scotland's rigidly orthodox critics, and that this was the result.

"Oh, dinna say it—dinna say that! I think so myself when I look at her, and when I hear her speak; but oh, mem, though she's very good in words—the thing I cannot get over is—that bairn."

"What bairn?" cried Marjory, aghast.

"Did they no tell you? I thought they would; for it's no right to let a leddy come without hearing. It's like deceiving a minister. Ay, mem, that's just it. Poor thing, she has had a bairn."

It would be impossible to tell the revulsion of feeling with which Marjory received this news. She gazed aghast at her questioner, she coloured as deeply as if she herself had been the guilty

person, and finally she turned and fled homeward without reply. To such a question, what answer could be made.

“I cannot advise you, I cannot advise you!” she cried. She put her hands to her ears, that she might not hear more. She quickened her steps, stumbling over the grass. Was there then nothing in the world which could be accepted honestly, as pure and true, without horrors of questioning and investigation? When she had gone half the way, Marjory sank down on the turf, and covered her face with her hands, and wept bitter tears of grief and mortification. Her very heart was sick. After all her new friend was nothing to her—the chance acquaintance of an hour—a girl in a totally different sphere, where such sins were differently thought of; and yet, this new disappointment seemed somehow to chime in with the irritation of the previous night. Perhaps it was her nerves which were affected. Pain and shame, and a sensation of wounded and outraged feeling, such as she had never known before, overwhelmed her being. Was

there nothing real—nothing reliable—nothing to be trusted in this whole miserable, sinful world?

CHAPTER XV.

MARJORY did not leave the house for some days. She was disgusted with everything. She had no heart to encounter the shining of the ceaseless sunshine out of doors, and the gay scenes upon the Links—gay yet sober, with a Northern brightness. They seemed to tantalise and mock her in the heaviness of her heart. And yet when she considered calmly (or tried to do so) she had so little foundation for this excessive and fantastic feeling. So far as Fanshawe went, she might never, she said to herself, see him again; and though of course she could not help having a certain feeling of friendship for him, considering the circumstances in which they

had been drawn together, yet, after all, whether he was a good-for-nothing, or the most useful and admirable member of society, it mattered very little to Marjory. And in so far as respected this unknown girl, it mattered less still — it mattered absolutely nothing. Marjory knew, as all who know the peasant population of Scotland are compelled to admit, however reluctantly, that deviations of such a kind are unfortunately much too common, and in general much too leniently judged. Such painful incidents of rural life had come in her way before, and shocked and disturbed her without having this paralyzing and sickening effect. Why was it? Was it her nerves, her bodily health, one of those simple physical reasons which disagreeable philosophers represent as at the bottom of all our supposed moral sentiments? This was an explanation which Marjory hated and scorned, as was natural, and which vexed her already wounded mind all the more that she could not absolutely put it out of the question. It might be that suffering and exhaustion had given to events, which would have affected her little under other circumstances,

a special power to sting. She had to account for her gloom to her uncle by a headache, that most plausible excuse for all unrevealable griefs, and she overcame Milly by a quick prayer for silence—

“Never mind me, dear,” she said. “I am worried; my head aches—don’t ask me any questions.”

Obedient Milly asked no more, but she crept to her sister’s side, and kept looking at her with wistful glances, which were more inquisitive than the questions themselves. Marjory was a person of too much importance to be allowed to be out of temper, or out of heart, with impunity.

“Your headache is lasting a long time, my dear,” Mr. Charles said, after vainly suggesting “a turn on the Links” by way of remedy. “Don’t you think it would be well to see the doctor?”

And Milly wept a few ready tears at the idea that May might be ill. Thus Marjory was compelled to give up her headache; but her heart-ache, which nobody knew of, was more difficult

to get rid of. She went no more to the Spindle, but strayed listlessly along the country roads, which are not interesting, and tried her best to forget all about an encounter which had interested her so much at first, and had wounded her so unduly. Both the interest and the vexation were, she felt, excessive—a trick of the nerves, a weakness of the body, a tendency to emotion, produced by the strain she had sustained for so long.

A whole week had elapsed in this way, when one day she was told that a woman wanted to see her; “a decent woman, but a poor body,” was the description of the maid. Marjory went down to the court to see this visitor, expecting some applicant from the poor quarter of the town, or other petitioner. She was surprised and excited to see that it was the woman who had caused her so much vexation, the mistress of the cottage at the Spindle, who stood with an anxious face, expecting her approach.

“Oh, mem,” she cried, almost as soon as Marjory came in sight. “Come back, come back, and see yon poor lass! She’s breaking

her heart. She's been worse than ever, crying for you night and day, and since she heard that I had tell't ye, she's had no peace in her mind. All her cry is, 'Bring back the leddy, bring back the leddy! I canna die till I've seen the leddy.' We've tried to pacify her a' we could. We've said nae doubt you were gane away; folk come to St. Andrews for the sea-bathing, and then they go away; or we said nae doubt the leddy finds it's ower long a walk; but naething would content her; and at last I came away, seeing it was my fault, to try if I could find you. And oh, mem, maybe I was hard-hearted yon day. We mauna be unforgiving. She's but a bairn, so to speak, and it was a gentleman that deluded her with his flattering tongue. When it's a gentleman it's a' the harder on a poor lass; and they have such deceiving ways. When I was young myself, there was a student lad, a minister's son, no less——"

"What does she want with me?" said Marjory, coldly.

"Oh, mem, how can I tell ye? whiles a poor creature like that will take a yearning; it may

be for one thing, it may be for another. Sometimes it's for meat and drink; but this poor thing is no of that kind. You've spoken to her soft and kindly, as I dinna doubt is your nature, and she canna bide that you should think ill of her."

"How can I do other than think ill of her," said Marjory, "after what you said?"

"Well, mem, I canna tell. You maun hear her story; one says one thing, and another another. I canna tell the rights of it; but this I maun say that she's no just a common lass. If there are any excuses that a lady like you would think excuses, you may be sure she has them; and it would break a heart of stone to see her there, whiles in her bed, whiles on her chair, greeting and praying, 'Oh, bring the leddy back!' I canna stand it, mem," said the woman, wiping her eyes, "I canna stand it, and if you saw her, neither could you."

Then a curious sensation came over the proud young lady, who had been so deeply disgusted. It was as if some frozen spring in her had suddenly melted; her whole heart seemed to

give way. A kind of yearning desire to obey the call thus made upon her, overcame all other feelings in her mind. She made a brief, ineffectual stand against this flood of unaccountable emotion.

“I do not see what good I can do her,” she said. “I have no right to judge her, and I don’t judge her; but what can I do? If I can help her in any way, you have only to tell me; but I, whom she scarcely knows, who know nothing of her, why should I go to her? What good could I do?”

“Na, men,” said the woman earnestly, “that’s mair than I can tell. It’s just a fancy. I’m no saying it’s more than a fancy; but ah, you ken yourself, sometimes all the world is no so much good to us as just something we have wished for and wanted; some bit thing that was nae solid advantage. Oh! if you would but come! You’re a leddy well kent and much thought o’, that can take no harm. It could not harm you; and oh! the comfort it would be to her!”

“Did you know me?” said Marjory, not know-

ing how to delay a little longer, and to make a last effort to stifle the melting of the heart in her own breast; "or did she know me? How did you trace me here?"

"Poor thing, she knows nobody," said the woman; "and neither did I ken ye, mem. I ken few strangers. I found ye out by your description. I spoke to a friend of mine, a fisher's wife, that comes whiles with her creel to the door; and as soon as she had heard me out, she said, 'Unless I'm sair mista'en, I ken the young leddy;' and, sure enough, she brought me to this door; but now I ken ye, Miss Heriot. My man has a cousin that lives at Comlie, and mony a time I've heard of the Laird's family. Oh! Miss Heriot, come out with me! She's in her bed, yon poor lass. Come and give her a little life, and hear her story. The sight of her would melt a heart of stone."

Marjory's was not a heart of stone, and it pled with her, more strongly than did this intercessor. She had seen the girl only three or four times, and had spoken to her but twice;

though that had been enough to rouse in her a vague but powerful sentiment, for which she felt there was no adequate foundation. Now, however, this sentiment rose into a certain passionate force; she dismissed her visitor with a vague promise to go some time or other; but the moment the woman was gone, the pleading voice within awoke with double force, and gave her no rest. It interfered with her inevitable duties; it made her silent and preoccupied, unable to respond to her little sister's constant questions, and the remarks of Mr. Charles, who chose to come home for luncheon upon that day of all others, and was full of the doings of the new ladies at Pitcomlie, whom somebody he had met had been telling him doleful stories about. Mr. Charles's brow was puckered with anxiety, and his niece did not give him the sympathy he hoped for. "I do not know what is to come of the old house, or what I can do," he cried. "No doubt I am joint guardian; but how I am to fight against these two young women, or keep them from having their way—it's a position I never anticipated, never anticipated, May."

“No doubt.” She was thinking she heard the cry “bring back the leddy!” and Matilda and her sister had no interest for Marjory, even though they were turning upside down her father’s house.

“For you see,” said Mr. Charles, with his perplexed look; “though I am joint guardian, so is she; and you may say what you please, May, when it comes to be judged between two people, and one of them a pretty young woman, there’s no tribunal yet invented that will hold the scales of justice altogether even. I might do the best for the boy and his inheritance; but she’s his mother, and has nature on her side. The claims of nature might not tell so much if she were not bonnie; but the two together are irresistible. I do not know if I have your attention—”

“Oh yes, uncle!” said Marjory. But she was not, in reality, paying any attention. Her mind was away, speeding along the coast towards the Spindle Rock, and the lowly cottage under its shadow. Mr. Charles went back to his golf somewhat disappointed at the want of interest with which his complaints had been heard, and with a

secret uneasiness in his mind as to the cause of Marjory's abstraction. He ran over all the list of men whom he had asked to dinner, in the accidental manner suggested by Miss Jean, with an anxious self-inquiry whether any of them might have to do with it. The idea was not a pleasant one. He had obeyed the old woman's suggestion because he could not help himself, and with a secret certainty that nothing would come of it; but the thought that something might come of it was not agreeable. It confused him in his playing that afternoon; he made such a failure on the putting green as had not been known to be made by an experienced player for many a day, and covered himself with confusion. "It's all these young women," Mr. Charies said to himself ruefully; as, indeed, many another man has felt, if not said.

"May I come with you, May?" said little Milly wistfully. This was another difficulty to be got over. "I never go with you now; and at Pitcomlie I never was away from you."

"At Pitcomlie there were no links," said Marjory, smiling; and with a promise to walk

with her in the evening, she disposed of her little sister. The afternoon sunshine was blazing over the coast when she set out finally on her long walk. A whole fleet of red-sailed fishing-boats were out at sea, and dropping forth from the sheltered embrace of the little harbour; a brisk little wind was blowing from the west, a genial breeze which never disturbs the Firth, or brings up foaming waters in the bay. The sun shone with that soft and tempered light which rejoices the heart, without affecting unpleasantly the physical frame. Marjory hastened on, tracing the turnings of the coast, ascending and descending, now on the crest of the cliffs, now at their feet. She had no eyes for the landscape, no ear for the soft splash and murmur of the waves; her heart beat with anticipations for which it was impossible to give, even in imagination, any reasonable motive. Nothing that she could hear could affect her personally, and yet the emotion which possessed her was too strong to be entirely sympathetic. She said to herself that it must be some tale of pathetic shame for sin at the best, which awaited her; some story which might rouse her pity, but

which would probably repel and disgust her at the same time. What better could she look for? But she hastened as if to hear news of the greatest personal importance, with a thrill in her veins, and a quite unusual palpitation in her heart.

Just before she came in sight of the Spindle, a very unlooked-for encounter happened to Marjory; she had heard steps following her for some time, but was too much pre-occupied to notice them; nor was it until she heard a voice from behind addressing her that she thought at all on the subject. When she heard herself called, she turned round hastily, and to her great surprise found herself face to face with the young woman whom she had seen at Pitcomlie, and at the family burying-place. Her aspect, however, was changed; she it was now who accosted Marjory; and there was an amount of anxiety in her round face which changed its expression entirely; she kept calling, as if this anxiety had excited her beyond all ordinary habits of self-control. "Miss Heriot, Miss Heriot!" she cried, as she came forward, stumbling among the whin-bushes in her excitement. "Where are you going, where are

you going?" A certain sharp sense of amusement, mingled with anger, a perception of the ludicrous inappropriateness of the question, as addressed to herself by a person who had steadily refused to afford her any information as to her own movements, struck Marjory, amid all her impatience. She smiled as she turned round, and waited for a moment, in answer to the urgent appeal.

"Where am I going?" she said.

"Ay, Miss Heriot, where are you going? You may think I've nae right to ask!" cried the girl, breathless; "but you're a leddy, and I'm but an ignorant lass. Maybe I have something to hide, but you have nothing. Oh, for the sake o' a' that's merciful, tell me! it's straightforward and simple to you, but no' to me. You're going for your diversion, or for kindness, or for I kenna what; but me, I'm travailing and working for life and death; for the life or death of a poor sorrowful creature that's perishing of grief and shame, and has done nothing, nothing to be so sore punished!" she cried, with sudden tears.

Marjory had stopped, arrested, in spite of herself, by the passion in the girl's voice. Her heart softened unawares towards this penitent opponent, who had refused all explanation on her own part, and yet demanded it with such confidence. "I am going to the cottage at the Spindle," she said. "You have no right to ask, nor to interfere; but I tell you because you are in trouble; because you seem to think I have something to do with it."

"No!" said the girl, pausing in her breathless course; "no you; but them that belong to you. Oh, dinna be angry, dinna upbraid me! It maun be God that's brought you here. When I heard of the leddy, something told me it was you; but I wouldna believe it. I wanted to do a', a' mysel'; to bring her up from the gates o' the grave, to give her back her good name, to be her Saviour in this world. Eh, the Lord's hard upon us whiles! He'll let you do all the foolishness you please; but if there's one great thing, one good thing that ye would like to do, and then die—oh me, oh me! He brings in other folk; when your heart's full of hope, and ye see your way clear before ye—He brings in other folk!"

Here she sat down and covered her face and wept. That these tears sprung from some disappointment connected with herself, Marjory divined, though she could not understand how this could be. She stood by for some time, respecting the strong emotion which she did not understand. At last, however, she went up to her, and laid her hand softly on the young woman's shoulder.

“If I am to help you in anything,” she said, with a sudden inspiration, as unaccountable to herself as all the rest, “do not stop and cry, and lose precious time; but come, like a brave girl, as I am sure you are, and show me the way.”

“I will!” cried the girl, springing suddenly to her feet. “I will! there is enough for both you and me.”

The cottage door stood half open; everything was still about; there was at first no one to be seen. A lonely place, musical with ripple of waves, with soft sough of the quiet winds, with those mysterious breathings of nature which make for themselves a language in solitary

places. The two anxious and excited human creatures, one full of a sorrow and enthusiasm which had taken possession of her whole being—the other almost as much excited with that suspense of uncertainty, curiosity, and wonder which is equally enthralling—brought their painful life into the stillness, like creatures of another sphere, dispersing the natural sentiment of the place.

“There is no one here,” said Marjory, unawares; but her voice produced a strange echo, a low cry from the half open door, and immediately after the figure of the sick girl appeared, holding herself up by the door, and gazed out eagerly. Her face was suddenly suffused with colour and life as she saw them.

“Oh, come in! oh, come in!” she cried, with pathetic entreaty, tottering forward with extended hands. The other young woman brushed past Marjory without a word, and threw her arm round her sister.

“Bell, you’ll kill yourself!” she cried.

“And what if I did?” said the other, softly; “if you will but let me tell the lady. I must

tell the lady. Oh, come in, come in! do not pass by the door."

"I am coming," said Marjory; her heart strangely divided between sympathy and the involuntary repugnance which again made itself felt within her as she approached the girl who had "gone astray." It is hard for a delicate-minded woman, brought up in all feminine traditions, to overcome, without long training and some strong motive, this involuntary shrinking. She followed the sisters into the cottage with a strong thrill of repulsion, which almost tempted her to turn her back upon the sufferer. But she restrained herself, and entered after them into the dim little room. The sick girl had been seated near the open door, in a chair with pillows. Here her sister placed her again, propping her up. She was breathless with her exertions, but, notwithstanding her weakness, kept her anxious eye fixed upon Marjory, with an anguish of eagerness which fascinated the other, and held her fast. When Marjory sat down by her, this anxious gaze somewhat softened; the terror went out of it; she looked at her more calmly, her eyes lingering on her face.

“ You do not come near me to-day,” she said. “ You’re kind, but I can see the difference. You have come for Christian duty, but no so soft, no so sweet as when you came last and knew nothing. Oh, lady! you’ve judged me in your heart, and it’s no just. You have not waited to hear what I had to say.”

“ No,” said Marjory, “ that is true; but I don’t judge you. It is not for me to judge you, or any one. I have been disappointed—but God knows your excuses; how can I know them? I am very sorry for you,” Marjory added, sympathetic tears coming into her eyes as she saw the large drops that veiled the luminous dying brightness of the other’s.

“ Oh, my bonnie Bell,” cried the other girl. “ Never heed her; they’re all hard, hard, there’s nobody that understands but me.”

Bell did not make any answer. She fumbled with a black ribbon round her neck, pulling out slowly, with an effort which showed how great her weakness was, something which was hidden within her dress.

“ I’ve never taken it from its place,” she said,

“because he put it there himself. He hung it round my neck, and he said, ‘Some day, Isabell, some day I’ll put it on your finger.’ It’s aye been there since. Why should I put it on my finger when he’s no here to do it? Rings and ornaments are no for me. Oh, lady, your heart’s moved! Agnes, she’s saying something. My heart beats, and I canna hear.”

“She’s saying nothing but your name,” said Agnes, almost harshly, watching with a keenness that lost not a gesture or motion of the lips, the proceedings of the visitor. And, indeed, all that Marjory felt able to say was a startled wondering repetition of the name, “Isabell, Isabell, Isabell!”

“Here it is,” said the poor girl, panting with the effort, and holding out in the palm of her worn hand, with a piteous mingling of tears and pride, a ring attached to her ribbon. “Naebody has seen it till now. I’ve carried it next my heart. He was not the one, oh, he was never the one to bring shame on them he loved! I wasna his equal—him a gentleman that made the heart glad to see him, and me an ignorant creature

that knew nothing. But I took his fancy. Oh, lady, maybe it's because you are a lady and kind, that I think you're sometimes like him, the turns of your voice and the way you put your hands. I took his fancy. When you came and sat under the Spindle Rock, and saw me sitting at my door—some way, oh, men," she cried, with a pathetic apology, "I took your fancy too!"

"Go on, go on!" cried Marjory.

But Isabell knew no reason for haste. She looked at the others wondering. They were excited, but she, poor soul, had ceased to be excited. A kind of pensive shadow of happiness stole over her as she traced out the story of her love, and sought that simple apology for her lover.

"I took your fancy too," she repeated, softly. "I watched, and watched, and wished you would speak, but it was you that came the first. That was just as he did; but men are no made like us. Yours was kindness, but his was love. Oh, lady, dinna hurry me; my heart's fluttering as if it would break forth; it's like a bird in my breast. I'm his marriet wife."

“Whose wife?” cried Marjory, rising up. She came forward in her excitement, her tall figure towering over the others. Her passion of anxiety and wonder took almost the form of anger. “Whose wife?” she repeated, involuntarily taking hold of the ring. “Is this all you have to make you so? Oh, woman, do not make me curse the dead in his grave! Is this all? Did he deceive you so?”

“What does she say—what does she say? Oh, my heart’s fluttering! Was that all? I am his marriet wife,” cried the girl. “I am his marriet wife!”

Marjory turned her eager eyes to the other, breathless, unable to speak. Agnes had her arm round her sister, supporting her. She was defiant, as always, but somewhat subdued by the command in the eyes of the lady, whom she felt to be her rival.

“It was a private marriage,” she said, hurriedly. “No the minister; poor folk are no like leddies. It wasna right, but it’s nae shame. They were marriet—before witnesses. He took

her, and she took him. It's a thing that's done among the like of us."

Marjory stood stupefied in the centre of the little dim room, faintly lighted by its green windows. It seemed to her that she could neither move nor speak. Was it a dream? or was it possible? Could it be? All her old thoughts at the reading of Tom's letter swept over her mind like a gust. If this was Isabell, then what was her real position? and what changes might be involved of which nobody had dreamed? Marjory's heart began to flutter like the sick girl's. A cloud of confusion seemed to float round her. She saw the others but dimly out of her hot excited eyes. Isabell—his wife! "God help us," she stammered, not knowing what she said. "I don't understand it—I don't understand it! Whose wife?"

Isabell raised her pathetic eyes, wondering and appealing, to her visitor's face. Agnes looked at her steadily with an uncommunicating defiance. The one knew nothing of the confusion in Marjory's mind, but only felt with a painful anguish such as sometimes rends the hearts of

the dying, that this sympathy which she longed for, had failed her—the other knew, and confronted the lady who was her rival, daring her to avoid the revelation which was impending, but altogether unconscious and incapable of comprehending Marjory's thoughts. Neither of them spoke. And in the moment everything that had happened during the last four months whirled through Marjory's brain, passed before her eyes like a panorama. Poor Tom on his deathbed, playing with the something that he would and would not tell her—then in the last hurried scene of all believing he had told her, thanking God that he had done it. Oh! the pitifulness of that thanksgiving for a confession never made! Had he made it, where would this girl have been now? It might have been life to her instead of death, it might have saved the life of the old father who broke his heart for Tom. It might have—God knows what mazes of sudden fancy she plunged into;—then all in a moment, came back to find herself crouching down for support in her chair, holding by it, looking at Isabell's pale alarmed face through a darkness that slowly

dispersed. "What has happened?" she heard herself saying as she came out of the darkness. She had not fainted nor fallen; but a mist had come about her, parting her from reality, and engrossing her faculties at the very moment when the secret she had sought so long looked at her out of her companions' eyes.

As Isabell's face, however, slowly appeared to her out of that mist, and she saw the intense expression of suffering and anxiety in it, the weakness, every blue vein showing, the large circle round those too luminous eyes, the wistful look in which her whole soul was—Marjory's heart was touched so suddenly that one impulse swept all other feelings away.

"Poor Isabell, poor Isabell!" she said with a cry unawares. "He tried to tell me on his death-bed. It was not his wish to leave you so. He thought he had told me;" and with an effusion of pity and tenderness which overcame all doubt, she took the girl's wasted hands into her own.

Wonder overcast poor Isabell's face. She began to cry softly, overpowered by the sweet-

ness of this accost, but not knowing what it meant. "Oh, did you know him?" she murmured. "Oh, weel I ken he meant no harm. Lady, lady, did you know my Mr. Heriot—my man, my dear, dear man?"

"Bell," cried Agnes, whispering in her ear. "Bell! it's Miss Heriot her very sel!"

That evening Marjory sent a hurried anxious note to Fanshawe, calling upon him to come and help her. She did it by a sudden impulse, carried away by feelings which she felt incapable of expressing to any one else. Him only she could confide in, he only could help her in the struggle that was to come. ∞

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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